

RUSSELL UNLEASHED

CAN GEORGE LEAD A
MERCEDES REVIVAL?



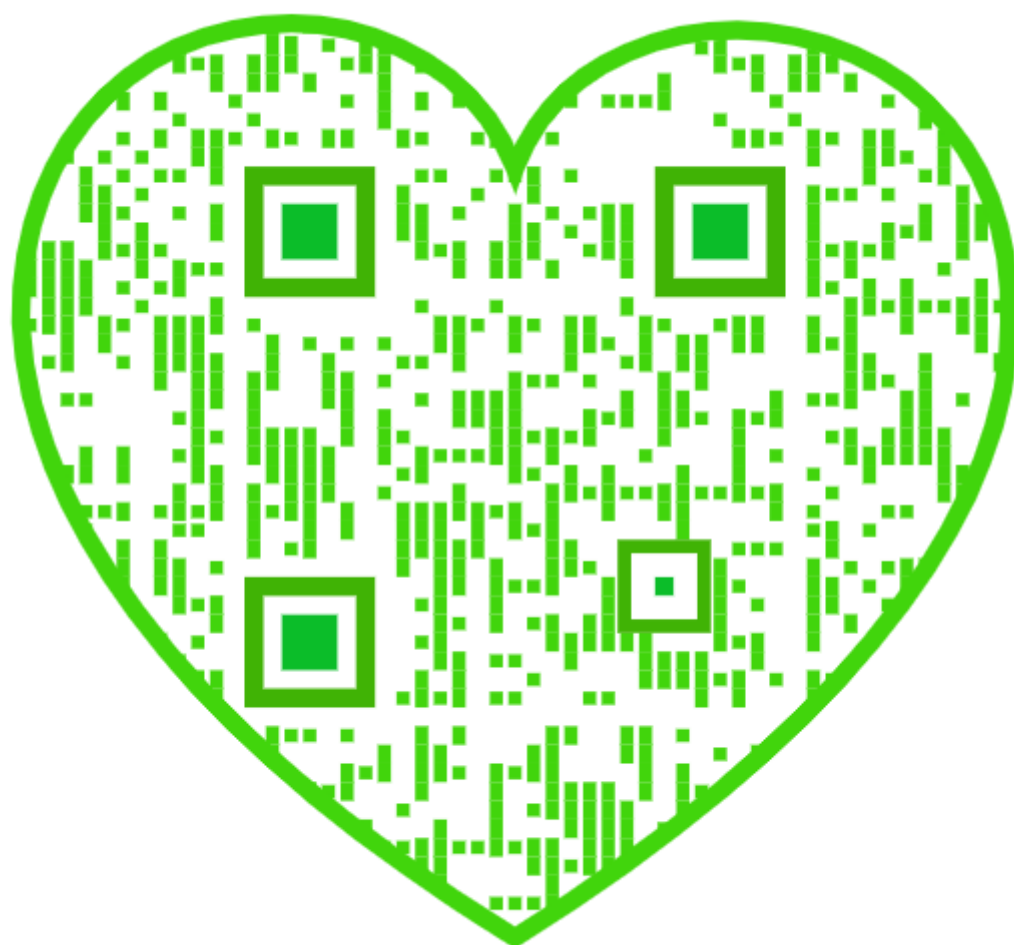
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BIG QUESTIONS
OF F1 2025

ASTON MARTIN'S
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MERCEDES



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Russell showed his class in 2024, including leading Hamilton in a fine Mercedes 1-2 at the Las Vegas GP



MAUGER/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Is it now Russell's time to really shine?

Much of the focus last year was on the title battle between Max Verstappen and Lando Norris, and Lewis Hamilton's move to Ferrari. But George Russell also made his presence felt in Formula 1 in 2024. Not only did he win two grands prix, but he beat Hamilton in the championship and clashed with Verstappen off-track at the end of the year in Qatar and Abu Dhabi.

Now de facto Mercedes team leader, Russell talks to Ben Hunt in this issue about the opportunities for a Mercedes revival, working with rookie team-mate Andrea Kimi Antonelli, and how Hamilton's departure should provide a fresh start for all involved (see page 24). A lot will depend on the car Mercedes can provide, of course, but the signs are that Russell is ready to take on the best.

There are plenty of other storylines to look forward to in 2025, and F1 pundit Karun Chandhok takes on the big questions in his traditional pre-season piece, after a bit of back and forth with Autosport. Turn to p34 to see if you agree with his answers!

Haas newcomer Ollie Bearman opens up to Alex Kalinauckas in this month's other big interview as the Briton prepares for his first full season in F1 (p44), but it's not all about looking forward. In our 'Now that was a car' series, Stuart Codling charts the strange story of the final machine to win a world championship GP in private hands (p50), and a book extract recalls the lost talent of 1960s rising star Chris Bristow (p58).

The rebooted Autosport Awards kicked off our 75th anniversary celebrations on 29 January at London's Roundhouse (p16). For full details on the winners, please head to [autosport.com](https://www.autosport.com), but the awards voted for by fans went to Max Verstappen (International Racing Driver presented by Pirelli and Moment of the Year presented by Bahrain International Circuit for his Brazilian GP masterclass in the rain), Lando Norris (British Competition Driver), McLaren's

MCL38 (International Competition Car), Sebastien Ogier (International Rally Driver) and Jake Hill (National Driver). Our thanks to all of you who voted and congratulations to the night's winners, particularly Deagen Fairclough for scooping the 2024 Silverstone Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year Award (p74), following in the footsteps of Russell and Norris.

Outside of F1, the biggest motorsport story of 2025 – at least for British and Le Mans fans – is probably Aston Martin's return to the top flight of endurance racing. Gary Watkins talks to the key players of the Valkyrie LMH programme, which is arguably Aston's most serious effort to repeat its 1959 Le Mans and sportscar world championship successes (p92), and picks out other things to look forward to in this season's World Endurance Championship (p98).

The American motorsport season is really kicking off, so Jake Boxall-Legge speaks to Prema Racing boss Rene Rosin about the European powerhouse's IndyCar challenge (p80), and Nick DeGroot is your guide to NASCAR, kicking off with the Daytona 500 (p118).

More Daytona action comes with our debrief on the 24 Hours (p86), which not only provided another win for Porsche but also allowed former Young Driver finalist Nick Tandy to complete his 24-hour set and become the first person to take outright victories in the Le Mans, Daytona, Spa and Nurburgring endurance classics.

M-Sport and Ford took on the gruelling Dakar Rally last month and Tom Howard picks out what went well – and not so well – in this issue's rally feature (p108), plus explains how Ogier took an astonishing 10th victory on the Monte Carlo Rally (p104), while Stephen Lickorish investigates where UK club motorsport could be in 10 years' time (p130) as part of our 17-page National section.

The next issue will be our F1 season guide, covering all the teams and the big names. It will also include in-depth analysis of Bahrain testing, so please keep an eye out for our April issue from 11 March.



Kevin Turner

Kevin Turner
Chief Editor

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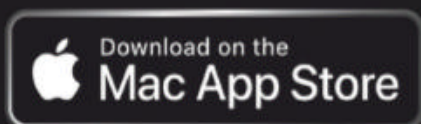
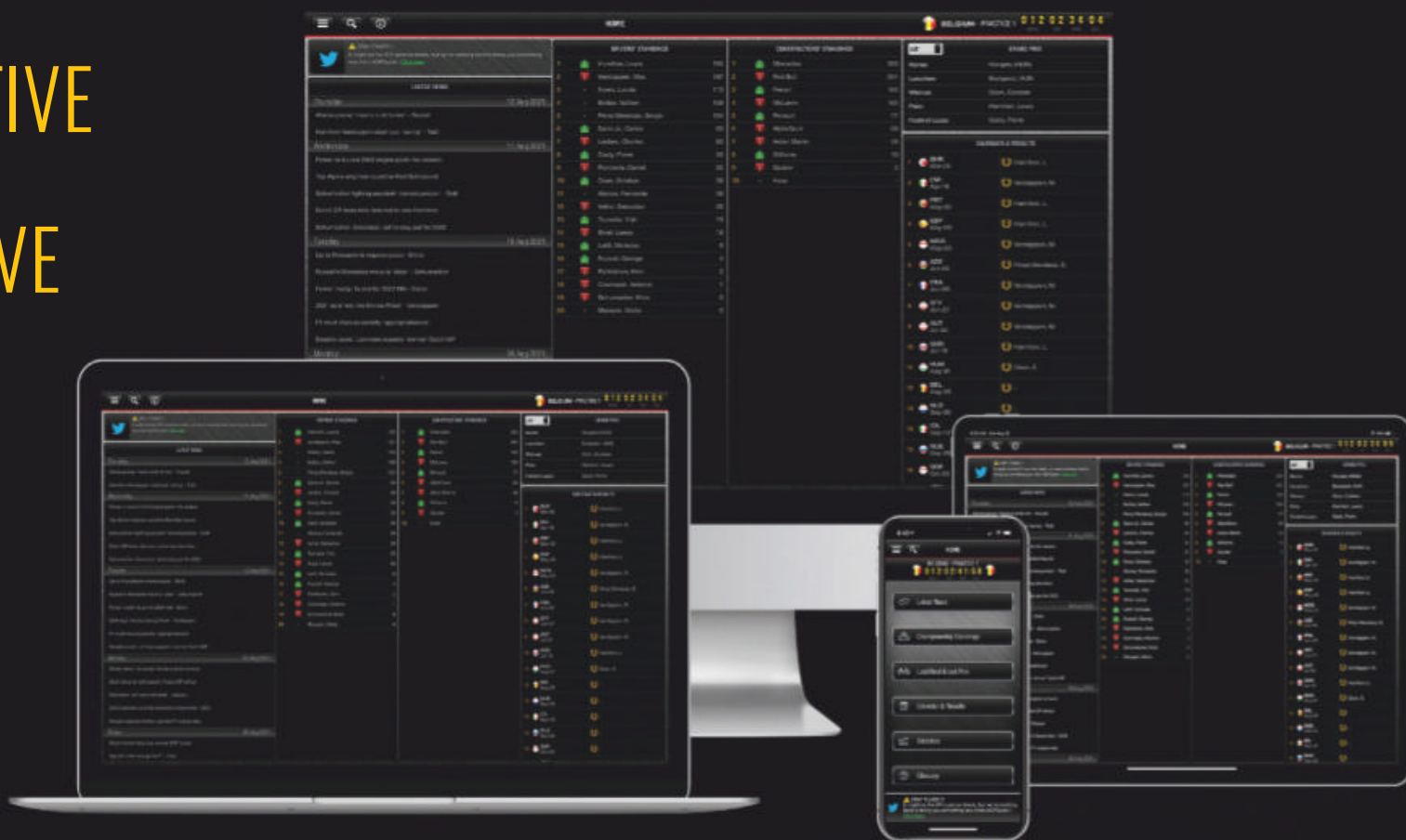


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Forever in red genes

Lewis Hamilton said “part of me has always held onto that dream of racing in red” and, on a chilly winter’s day in Maranello, he took another step towards realising that dream. Naturally it became a poor day for productivity in the area as fans gathered to watch history in the making. Back in the days of unlimited testing, this was virtually an annual event as onlookers fought to gain a glimpse of Ferrari’s new car. Now, of course, it’s a new pilot in an old car, and Lewis will be hoping this is the slowest Ferrari F1 car he’ll ever drive. Not that setting lap times would have been a goal on a day like this, running under strict Testing of Previous Cars protocols in inclement weather...

Photography Ferrari

Where Fiorano, Italy

When Wednesday 22 January 2025

Winner
McLaren MCL38

2025
AUTOSPORT
AWARDS
For the Fans





A Stella performance

McLaren team principal Andrea Stella has never sought the limelight, so he was surprised to be called on stage not once but twice at the Autosport Awards, firstly to receive the Person of the Year gong and then to appear alongside the team's technical leaders to receive the International Competition Car of the Year award for the MCL38. "Definitely I wasn't ready to be receiving a personal award, an award of this prestige from Autosport and the motorsport community," he said after stepping up for the first time. "This award needs to be shared with the McLaren team, the people I collaborate with every day." The second time on stage was the perfect opportunity to do just that.

Photographer Andrew Ferraro/
Motorsport Images

Where The Roundhouse, London
When Wednesday 29 January 2025





Le Petoulet in the middle

The day this edition of Autosport arrives on the shelves – 13 February – is the 20th anniversary of the death of Maurice Trintignant, pictured on one of his finest days behind the wheel of a racing car: the 1955 Monaco Grand Prix. Trintignant (44), seen here running behind Giuseppe Farina (42), qualified ninth in a second-string Ferrari entry. The 625, essentially an elderly Formula 2 car with a 2.5-litre engine, was nobody's idea of a likely winner but Trintignant, the epitome of a safe pair of hands, prospered as faster cars fell by the wayside. Famously, Trintignant had competed in the first post-war motor race, only to retire when scat from the rats which had colonised his car while in storage blocked the fuel filter; he was nicknamed 'Le Petoulet' (rat droppings) thereafter.

Photographer Motorsport Images

Where Monte Carlo, Monaco

When Sunday 22 May 1955



FERRARI

FORMULA 1

HAMILTON STARTS WORK AT FERRARI – AND CRASHES

Lewis Hamilton began preparations for his first season with Ferrari at the end of January with runs at Fiorano and Barcelona, although these were not without incident. The seven-time world champion crashed during the team's second day of running with its 2023 car at the Spanish Grand Prix venue.

Hamilton's opening day with Ferrari at Fiorano the previous week courted huge attention from its fervent tifosi, who made the pilgrimage to Maranello to catch a glimpse of his arrival. His new Giallo Modena-tinged crash helmet not only paid tribute to the tones of Ferrari's famed scudetto, but also signalled a reversion to his previous helmet design. His run followed the emergence of his first photoshoot outside of Enzo Ferrari's house, besuited and beside a Ferrari F40, which set tongues wagging on social

media. After being greeted with damp weather, he and Charles Leclerc clocked 131km (80 miles) of running at the Prancing Horse's private test track.

During his follow-up test at Barcelona on 28 January, Hamilton went off the road at Turn 12 and crashed into the barriers. The car sustained heavy damage to its front end, requiring lengthy repairs to the suspension and bodywork that went deep into that afternoon. Leclerc, who had been scheduled to take over the car for the afternoon, missed out on his planned running due to low visibility.

This fell under Ferrari's allowance for the testing of previous cars, with new regulations restricting race drivers to a cumulative total of 1000km (620 miles) over four days. There was no rescheduling of the test, meaning Leclerc left with no



FERRARI

running and the car was handed to reserve Antonio Giovinazzi and academy product Dino Beganovic.

Ferrari had further new staff to bed in at the Barcelona test, with new technical director Loic Serra and deputy team principal Jerome d'Ambrosio overseeing the running with the SF-23.

Hamilton's crash follows an inexplicable trend of shunts when joining a new team. On his first test with McLaren as a newly minted race driver in 2007, he put his new MP4-22 into the wall at the first corner of Valencia's Ricardo Tormo circuit. He then suffered a similar fate while testing for Mercedes in

preparation for his first season with the team in 2013, when he suffered a brake failure at Jerez's Turn 6 during his first day of running with that year's W04.

He has also bolstered his support team with the return of trainer Angela Cullen, with whom Hamilton formed a strong working relationship and friendship across six of his seven title wins before parting ways in 2023. New Zealander Cullen had been working with her compatriot IndyCar driver Marcus Armstrong for his opening seasons in the US-based series.

FRANCO NUGNES & ROBERTO CHINCHERO



WOOD/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

ODDS STACKED AGAINST HERBERT

Three-time grand prix winner Johnny Herbert has been dropped from the FIA's roster of driver stewards, with the governing body citing his media punditry as "incompatible" with his stewarding role. The Briton has been a frequent member of the FIA's pool of ex-professional racing drivers, who are required to act as one of four stewards who serve to officiate incidents at F1 events.

There has been significant interest in Herbert's FIA role since late in the 2024 season, when he was part of the stewards' panel that twice penalised Max Verstappen at the Mexican Grand Prix. In partnership with a betting company, Herbert subsequently commented on the decisions handed down by the body.

"Johnny is widely respected and brought invaluable experience and expertise to his role," the FIA stated. "However, after discussion, it was mutually agreed that his duties as an FIA steward and that of a media pundit were incompatible. We thank him for his service and wish him well in his future endeavours."

Herbert had previously dovetailed his role as a driver steward with a punditry role at Sky Sports, although did not pursue his TV work during weekends when he was on the list of stewards. He left the channel at the end of 2022.

Following his removal from the driver stewards' pool, Herbert has since been installed as global brand ambassador at Lola.

ALEX KALINAUCKAS



NG/SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Sweary F1 drivers
get set for book to
be hurled at them

FORMULA 1

Bans for swearing

A series of new penalty guidelines introduced by the FIA could result in Formula 1 drivers collecting fines or championship points penalties for swearing or other sporting code violations.

Following the governing body's clampdown on language deemed as offensive, particularly after Max Verstappen swore in a press conference in Singapore last year, it has now introduced an updated version of the FIA's sporting code with guidelines for infractions with regards to misconduct.

These guidelines also include base fines, which are multiplied by four for F1 drivers. Committing an offence within the bounds of misconduct includes a €10,000 base fine for the first offence – which becomes €40,000 for an F1 driver – rising to a base €20,000 fine (€80,000 in F1) and a suspended one-month suspension on the second offence. A further instance involves a fine of €30,000 (€120,000 in F1), "plus one-month suspension plus deduction of Championship points".

Similar penalties will be granted for "any words, deeds or writings" that the FIA considers injurious to itself, its members or its executive officers, and "any public incitement to violence or hatred". The FIA has also retained the same

fines for "the general making and display of political, religious and personal statements or comments notably in violation of the general principle of neutrality".

The International Sporting Code also includes infractions for any failures to commit to the environmental guidelines set by the governing body, along with further additions for inadmissible protests; a protest will now require individual applications for each subject. The sporting code also dictates that "any protest against a stewards' decision will be inadmissible".

In tangentially related news, Gordon Ramsay has signed a partnership with Formula 1 to supply food for the championship's pit garage hospitality suites at 10 races in 2025. The famously foul-mouthed chef will supply dishes created by he and "his team of executive chefs" at the Miami, Monaco, Montreal, Silverstone, Monza, Austin, Mexico City, Las Vegas, Losail and Yas Marina races. This was trialled at the 2024 Las Vegas round, where the hospitality was rebranded as 'Ramsay's Garage' and featured live cooking stations, as well as appearances (obviously non-swearing) from Ramsay (pictured left, with McLaren's Zak Brown) himself.

JAKE BOXALL-LEGG



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Remember the ‘breakaway’ GP at Kyalami in 1981? The winner was Carlos Reutemann

FORMULA 1

Africa’s F1 push

African hopes of rejoining the Formula 1 calendar have been further boosted by the South African government opening bids to organise and promote a grand prix. The country’s ministry of sport, arts and culture has commissioned a ‘Bid Steering Committee’ to invite contenders in the hope of returning to the calendar, with an aggressive target of obtaining a race by 2026 or 2027.

Representatives held an

exploratory chat with F1 CEO Stefano Domenicali at last year’s Azerbaijan Grand Prix, and have issued a 37-page request for expression of interest detailing the various requirements for organising a race. The tender calls for an “iconic destination location” close to a major city, emphasising the reliance on public transport and renewable energy to meet F1’s sustainability criteria, with a capacity to host up to 125,000 spectators per day, and a 4.5-5.5km (2.8-3.4-mile) circuit boasting a straight of at least 1km.

Kyalami, the country’s most renowned circuit and host of 21 grands prix from 1967 to South

Africa’s most recent in 1993, is a frontrunner, pending the completion of ongoing work to elevate the circuit to the required FIA Grade 1 standard. Another bid comes from the Cape Town Grand Prix SA, which intends to host a race on a 5.7km street circuit around the city’s waterfront and DHL Stadium. This area hosted a one-off Formula E race in 2023, although a purpose-built circuit on the Cape Town outskirts is seemingly another option.

The original bid request was published on 17 January with a deadline of 31 January, but the ministry has now extended that deadline to 18 March to give hopeful bidders more time to put together and file an expression of interest. “Hosting a Formula 1 Grand Prix would boost our economy, tourism and development while showcasing South Africa as a premier global sporting destination,” said South Africa’s sporting minister Gayton McKenzie.

Rwanda is also hoping to secure a Formula 1 race at a purpose-built circuit on the outskirts of its capital Kigali, next to the under-construction Bugesera International Airport.

FILIP CLEEREN



Formula E raced in Cape Town in 2023



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the latest from the world of motorsport and deliver it directly to your inbox.



EX-SAUBER CHIEF JOINS MCLAREN

Former Sauber managing director and representative Alessandro Alunni Bravi has joined McLaren as chief business affairs officer, after departing the Swiss team at the end of January. The Italian’s (above) responsibilities will involve managing driver contracts, legal matters, and liaising with rights holders and the FIA. He will also head up the McLaren driver development programme.

Meanwhile, at Haas Laura Mueller and Ronan O’Kane have been installed as race engineers to Esteban Ocon and Ollie Bearman respectively. Carine Cridelich joins from RB as race strategy engineer, Francesco Nenci becomes chief race engineer, and Mark Lowe comes in as sporting director. Team manager Peter Crolla has left, as has Aston Martin-bound Gary Gannon.

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

2025 AUTOSPORT AWARDS

The new-look Autosport Awards took place on 29 January at London's Roundhouse and attracted a star-studded cast to celebrate some special motorsport accolades

PHOTOGRAPHY **DUNBAR/MOTORSPORT IMAGES**

Bernie Ecclestone was given our 75th anniversary honouree prize by Piero Ferrari (left) and the Duke of Richmond



Abbi Pulling picked up her trophy for the F1 Academy title



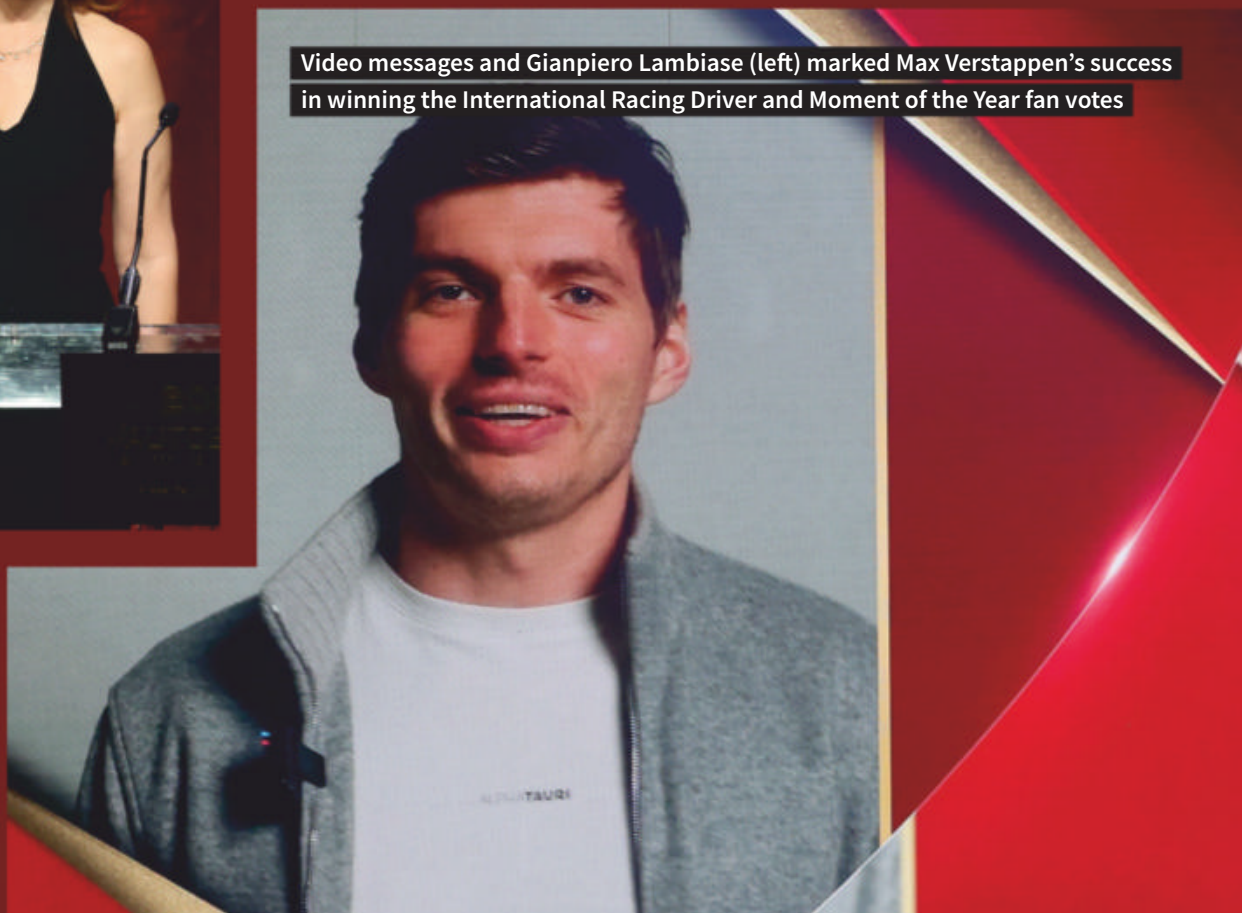
Andrea Stella took our new Person of the Year award



JOHN PHILLIPS



Video messages and Gianpiero Lambiase (left) marked Max Verstappen's success in winning the International Racing Driver and Moment of the Year fan votes



Mel C and BRM V16 helped bring the night to a close



British Touring Car champion Jake Hill scooped National Driver of the Year honours



James Vowles revealed the 10 rising stars who will be part of the new Komatsu-Williams Engineering Academy





INSIDER

Alex Kalinauckas wonders if stick really needs to match carrot in F1

There's a name that should be etched into the minds of the five rookies (and Liam Lawson) gearing up for the 2025 Formula 1 season: Logan Sargeant. As the affable Jack Doohan eased himself effortlessly into the chair to my right at the Autosport Awards at the end of January, my mind shot back two years, to Williams's 2023 season launch. There, Sargeant faced the F1 press corps en masse – never a driver's favourite task.

And yet the American aced it. At ease and loquacious, he had *something*. Barely three months later, whatever it was had disappeared, amid a run of crashes from which Sargeant, really, never recovered. At the Hungarian Grand Prix a year later, his dejection overhung what defiance he could muster.

Back to Doohan and his dapper all-black-but-no-tie outfit. Already, Alpine has put him in a situation that bears alarming hallmarks of what eventually befell Sargeant at Williams. Specifically, after it had opted to give him a second go for 2024.

For Sargeant, this was to keep his feet to the fire with regular (albeit eloquent) media broadsides from team boss James Vowles, plus the 'will-they, won't-they?' saga over Andrea Kimi Antonelli possibly making an early F1 bow with the Mercedes-aligned squad. For Doohan, rumours that his contract covers just the start of the upcoming campaign have only been fuelled by Alpine signing Franco Colapinto – eventually Sargeant's temporary replacement after all – as its 2025 reserve. Toyota World Endurance driver Ryo Hirakawa has been granted the same deal, it is believed, on the understanding that he's a candidate for a 2026 race drive. Alpine team boss Oliver Oakes claims Doohan is "getting his fair crack at it". But that this has happened all before Doohan has actually had anything like that in 2025 seems, frankly, rather harsh.

But two chairs further to my right at the Roundhouse sat someone who is apparently already having a positive impact on Doohan's start to life as an F1 racer: Pierre Gasly. He had a far more traditional tuxedo, but both Alpine drivers were sporting matching buzzcuts. In Doohan's case, the Australian is getting

back to what he's well aware is the ruthless F1 business – shedding the flowing locks he'd allowed to flourish into quite the surfer-dude look while not in a racing programme last year.

This match was just the first sign of something delightful. Across the evening, it became clear how well they are getting on. Accompanied by two Alpine press attaches – plus Gasly's manager – the laughter was flowing. Especially after Doohan discovered a pair of Gasly's race-worn boots formed part of the auction to raise funds for the Grand Prix Trust.

Once the drivers had departed, I gleaned that their friendship is both genuine and flourishing from their team's point of view. Again, another F1 comparison stepped forward: how Gasly got on so well with Yuki Tsunoda during their time as AlphaTauri team-mates. It was noticeable that as soon as Tsunoda was back racing with a direct rival at the start of 2024 – against Daniel Ricciardo, with the possibility of replacing Sergio Perez at Red Bull then forefront in the thinking for both – that the worst of the Japanese driver's traits came back to the fore. The radio airwaves awfulness; the near-collision post-race in Bahrain...

In a tale as old as time in so many walks of life, some drivers

“In a tale as old as time, some drivers just need to be really settled to achieve their best”

just need to be really settled to achieve their best. Gasly is a prime example, his 2024 Alpine season quietly ending up alongside his race-winning and podium-clinching best for his previous squad from 2020-21. But Alpine just seems to be matching the carrot with the stick, like Helmut Marko and the Red Bull driving fold. That went spectacularly well with Perez...

The other standout memory from my night alongside the Alpine drivers was how they rose to greet the inevitably fashionably late Flavio Briatore – like Marko, not a man to be trifled with. You wonder whether it's his Machiavellian streak that has led to Alpine piling up driving options even before Doohan's first full season begins. But harmony can win out – even in F1's cut-throat word. And for Doohan and Gasly – the buzzcut brothers – I sincerely hope it does. F1 had plenty of feelgood stories last year. Perhaps this can be one in 2025. 🌟

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INSIDER

Russell's Verstappen rant had other targets, reckons Oleg Karpov

George Russell is a smart chap. Derek Warwick will tell you he wants to ruffle his hair every time he sees him, such a know-all can Russell sometimes be. There's a good reason why he's the one representing the Grand Prix Drivers' Association. He's smart, sensible and speaks well.

He didn't really need to use the f-word when giving his media response to Max Verstappen. After the Dutchman's "I've lost all respect for Russell" remark in Qatar, George produced enough quotes for a series of headlines on Thursday of the Abu Dhabi GP weekend in December. He unleashed the first part in a session with a small group of media (Autosport included) and then doubled down in a larger conference a couple of hours later.

Quoting Verstappen's alleged threat to put Russell on his "f***** head in the wall" wasn't entirely necessary. But Russell understands the nature of the modern media world – that line alone was sure to generate extensive coverage. On that Thursday before the final race weekend of the championship, he spoke about Max for just under half an hour. He clearly wanted to be heard. He talked about how threatening to crash into someone is "beyond the line". He drew parallels between Max's reaction to his – Russell's – behaviour in the stewards' room in Qatar, where George tried to get his rival a penalty, and Verstappen's own attempts to get Lando Norris punished through the radio messages the very next day for not slowing under yellows. He described some of Verstappen's overtaking attempts as "reckless". And he stated that if Max had lost a championship the way Lewis Hamilton did in 2021, Michael Masi "would be fearing for his life".

"I'm not going to stand here watching some guy slam me personally, as he has done," added Russell. And yet, while it's right to stand up to a bully (Russell's word, not Autosport's), it's probably a little naive to expect any of this to have any effect on Verstappen himself. Because, frankly, he doesn't give a damn what Russell – or probably any of his colleagues – thinks of him.

There's no point in exposing the questionable manner in

which he sometimes conducts himself in wheel-to-wheel battles. It doesn't really make sense to point out double standards in his words or deeds. And while it's an entertaining exercise to prove that Verstappen will sometimes confront his rivals over actions he finds perfectly acceptable to use himself, he'll not change. Because in his own moral framework, he's just never wrong. It's one of the reasons why he's so good: Verstappen doesn't waste a millisecond weighing up whether something is "fair" or "unfair". If something brings him closer to winning a race or a championship, he'll do what he thinks he has to do. That's just the way he operates.

And Russell surely knows that. He says so himself: "I'm not losing any sleep over it whatsoever. I know what Max is like. This is not the first time I've seen him like this. I've seen him like this as a 14-year-old in the go-kart paddock."

So the real audience for this message probably isn't Verstappen. It could be Russell's own team. It's George telling his 1000-plus Mercedes colleagues in Brackley and Brixworth (Toto Wolff included) that he's not going to be intimidated by anyone; that he's prepared to stand up for himself, and that he won't hesitate to hit back if necessary. It's him saying that he won't let them down, no matter who the rival is.

It would be wrong to say that it is impossible to beat Verstappen by doing it the Norris way – by fighting him hard on track while remaining his friend off it. But for this particular audience, the men and women of Mercedes, it was perhaps the only message Russell could have sent. These people at Mercedes know how to beat Verstappen. They don't need to check Wikipedia to see who won the championship in 2021. No one can convince them that they and Hamilton weren't the real winners. And they know that his uncompromising and relentless approach to this battle was the only right one. For them, Russell's bravado towards Verstappen – a rival in every sense of the word – must have been very pleasing to notice.

"Of course he's beatable," Russell said in Abu Dhabi. "When

"Frankly, he doesn't give a damn what Russell – or probably any of his colleagues – thinks of him"

he's in the most dominant car, he is not beatable. The same way as Lewis and I: when we had the most dominant car in Silverstone, in Las Vegas – we were not beatable either."

Now that's a statement. And a timely one too.

With Hamilton leaving, Russell has to step up. And he has no reason to doubt that he is ready to lead the team. He's done well against the most successful F1 driver of all time in the same car, outscoring him and outqualifying him comfortably last year, and winning more races during their time together at Mercedes. For him to lead Mercedes and fight for the title as early as 2025, only two things need to happen. First, Mercedes must provide him with a winning car. And second, he needs to put his money where his mouth is. 🏆

➔ **P24 RUSSELL'S 2025 CHALLENGE**



INSIDER

Is Adrian Newey right about F1 2026, asks Pat Symonds?

Adrian Newey thinks Formula 1's all-new technical regulations for 2026 may well lead to an engine-dominated series for the first few seasons, drawing parallels with 2014, but is this correct? To answer that question, we need to look back at the gestation period of the 2026 power unit rules and see how the final outcome has differed from the initial intent.

Whenever a new set of rules is proposed it is important to start with some objectives, and for 2026 the power unit objectives were to encourage new manufacturers, increase sustainability and decrease costs, while not jeopardising the closeness of performance between the various engines.

The removal of the MGU-H was done to reduce cost and, more importantly, simplify the engine. The MGU-H is not a complex device but the control strategies applied to it are very complex and fundamental to performance, so its elimination was accepted. Further simplification was proposed, which at the extreme would have dictated a near-standard internal combustion engine with the development emphasis going into the electrical system and hybrid energy management. With a near 50/50 split of power from the engine and the hybrid system this made sense. Moreover, at one stage a small four-cylinder transversely mounted engine coupled to a transverse gearbox was proposed. That would have led to a fundamental reduction in cost and weight, as well as allowing a much smaller car to be designed. Obviously, such a regime would have ensured that the formula would not be engine dominated.

However, as the manufacturers became more involved they felt that development should not be limited and that ICE improvements were not only relevant but important. They also felt that a V6 was more appropriate for F1. Perhaps most importantly, they rejected the idea of using front axle energy recovery, which was proposed to replace the energy lost by the removal of the MGU-H. It was this final change that probably had the most profound effect on the powertrain.

With the proposed 400kW engine and 350kW MGU the car

was now energy sparse, even with the drag reduction embodied in active aerodynamics. The introduction of sustainable fuel had the possibility of providing an unwanted performance differentiator, but the switch from mandating energy flow of the fuel rather than mass flow mitigated this to a large extent.

The significant reduction in recoverable kinetic energy that followed the ban on front axle energy recovery meant that electrical energy would have to be provided by using excess power from the engine to drive against the MGU, which would provide charge to the battery. This meant that any time the car was grip limited in its performance rather than power limited, in other words at pretty well any point towards the end of braking to the point where the driver was demanding more than 350kW of power at corner exit, the engine would be running at wider throttle than would normally be the case.

It is probably in this area that differences in the engines' abilities will be most noticed. That is not to say that full power is not significant – it is. The regulations dictate the fuel energy flow into the engine and this, given the target power of 400kW, suggests an efficiency of 48%. This is impressive when there is no exhaust heat recovery but, still, I expect it to be exceeded by the time next season starts. A 1% improvement in efficiency would relate to around an 11bhp increase which, on average, would improve lap times by around 0.13 seconds. What is also significant is that, due to the part-throttle electrical energy harvesting, part-throttle efficiency will be far more important than it is with the current engines.

A good racing engine is not just about power or efficiency. Driveability and integration are also important. The MGU-H, with its ability to drive the turbocharger, meant throttle lag was eliminated. The 2026 engine will have to use some electrical energy to infill torque until the compressor provides sufficient boost, although the part throttle use of the engine will help keep the turbo spinning. In terms of chassis integration, the ability to run high temperatures and so minimise the size of

“A good engine is not just about power or efficiency. Also important are driveability and integration”

radiators will bring aero benefits and the reduced ICE power will require less water cooling, although oil cooling will likely stay the same. The increased electrical power will, however, go the other way and increase the cooling requirements and hence the radiator sizes for the energy recovery system.

So overall I would say that, while Adrian's point is valid, the performance differentiation arising from better aerodynamics will, as always, outweigh that of engine power as he demonstrated so well with his three [Red Bull] wins in 2014. In addition, with the 2026 minimum weight limit almost impossible to achieve, the designer who gets closest to the weight limit will have a quantifiable advantage. ✎

Want to ask Pat a tech question for a future issue?

Let us know on autosport@autosport.com



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**I
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*George Russell is now the team leader at Mercedes,
and he's relishing the chance to head a revival*

BEN HUNT

PHOTOGRAPHY **MERCEDES AND MOTORSPORT IMAGES**



George Russell

Right: Hamilton's departure means start of a new era for Mercedes – and Russell's place within the team

Below right: Russell feels he gets better as a driver every year, alongside growing psychological strength

W

hisper it quietly, but there is an air of positivity surrounding the Mercedes team as it embarks upon a new era led by George Russell. It is a freshness that evokes memories of 2013 following Lewis Hamilton's arrival from McLaren and the addition of Toto Wolff into the management structure. Back then, ageing seven-time world champion Michael Schumacher left the Silver Arrows as it adjusted its driver line-up one year ahead of a substantial rule change and the introduction of the turbo-hybrid engine. Mercedes was reinvigorated, motivated and would go on to dominate Formula 1 for eight seasons.

This time, of course, it is the other seven-time world champion, Hamilton, who has left the team to join Ferrari one season before another big regulation change. Hamilton's departure has lit up social media streams with images of him dressed in Ferrari red at Maranello, but back in Brackley at the Mercedes HQ there is no lamenting his departure. In fact, after a number of false dawns, this can be seen as a fresh start, spearheaded by Russell, who will inherit Hamilton's position as the team's leader. It is a challenge he is relishing, alongside mentoring his rookie team-mate, Andrea Kimi Antonelli.

Russell is an affable character to interview. He's relaxed, engaging, articulate and passionate about the season ahead and how he is preparing to step up into his new role within the team. "When I joined Mercedes, I was very respectful of the relationship Lewis had with the team, and all the success they had together, plus Lewis's approach with the team," he reflects. "I didn't feel that I was ever in the shadows, but I didn't want to stamp my authority, because it just wouldn't have been correct at all. Whereas now, I don't need to stamp any authority, but it is a natural progression for us to start this next era with the team. We recognise what we've been doing for the last three years has not been working, so this is a fresh start, not only for myself or the team, also for Lewis. This is a new beginning for the three of us.

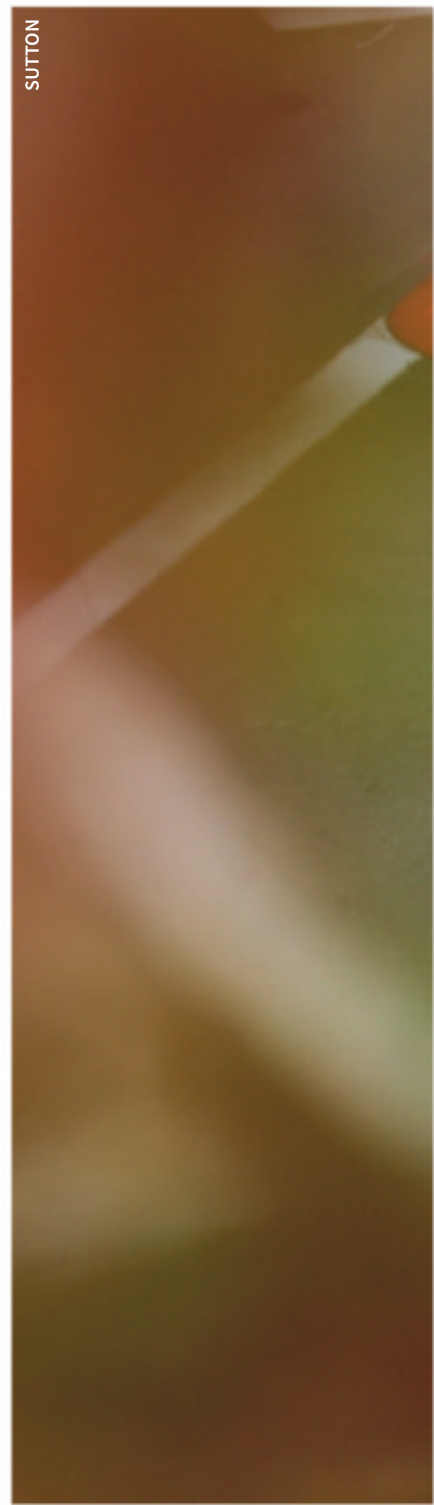
"It brings new motivation, it brings new challenges, and also with the arrival of Kimi, there might be some of the dynamic changing for everyone, and that may bring a positive feeling for all. For me, it's come at the right time. I'm still 26 years old [Russell turns 27 on 15 February]. I've got so much time left in me. I feel like I'm improving as a driver. I don't feel I'm in my prime yet because I recognise I'm still getting better every single year, and that excites me."

Russell is mature beyond his years. His mannerisms, style – even the way he talks – and his clean driving style means he is the quintessential 'gentleman' racer, who would probably be more suited to competing and socialising with the likes of Graham Hill and Bruce McLaren than anyone currently on the F1 grid.

Russell was only in his third season of F1 in 2021 when he took the role of director of the Grand Prix Drivers' Association. During his tenure, he's overseen a near-driver strike following a missile attack at the 2022 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix and become embroiled in the tensions between the drivers, F1 and the FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem. Autosport puts it to Russell that there is a sense of him coming of age and finding his voice to speak out on such matters against those in a position of power.

"I'm not really too sure how to answer this, to be honest, but I just feel very much a part of this sport with Mercedes," he muses. "I feel confident within myself. Ultimately, the driver needs to do the talking. You can have the best individuals talking off track and in front of the cameras, but if you don't also do the job on the track then sorry, it's for nothing. Within myself, I'm getting stronger as a driver year after year. I feel I'm getting stronger as a person, psychologically. Of course, it's been challenging being team-mates with Lewis for three years in every regard. But you know, I feel I've dealt with that very, very well.

"My time will come. Whether that's this year or next year, I have no doubt my time will come, »









HONE



SBLOXHAM

Left: Russell's broadside over Verstappen's behaviour both on and off track had been building for some time

Below left: Russell cites 2021 as "a great season" due to Hamilton never backing down against Verstappen

and I'm just working so hard every single day for the moment when it comes."

Perhaps the most notable example of Russell stepping out of the shadows and standing up for himself came in the form of his fervent criticism of Max Verstappen at the end of 2024. On the surface, it stemmed from the stewards' room at the race in Qatar when Verstappen was hit with a one-place grid penalty for impeding Russell. The four-time world champion responded by targeting the Brit, saying "I've never seen someone trying to screw someone over that hard. For me, I lost all respect." The insinuation was that Russell had coerced the stewards into issuing the penalty.

Verstappen would go on to double-down on his criticism of Russell at the season finale in Abu Dhabi. He took aim at Russell once more, accusing him of being a liar. "I just never expected someone to really try and actively get someone a penalty that badly," Verstappen said, "and lying about why I was doing what I was doing. But clearly it had an influence on [the stewards]."

What followed was most extraordinary. Russell conducted his press conference, unusually with Mercedes boss Wolff by his side (the Austrian even interjected at one point), and delivered a damning assessment of Verstappen's behaviour. In a speech that was laced full with emotion, Russell called Verstappen a bully and added: "He said he's going to purposely go out of his way to crash into me and, quote, 'Put me on my f***** head in the wall.'"

It transpires that Russell's passionate outburst was the culmination of years of frustration at watching Verstappen's behaviour. The language and tone may have changed since that final race in 2024, but it is clear that emotion behind his opinion has not dissipated.

"I am entering my seventh year of F1 now and you do start to recognise where you are," Russell explains. "You realise your own voice and the platform you have and the impact you can make. I thought it was important for myself, because I'm not going to accept being pushed around and disrespected in that regard so openly and publicly. That was the main driving force behind it. I've seen many people in life push and shove people around to get what they want. You need somebody to stand up to individuals like that. And nobody has done that whatsoever."

Russell stops for a second and the speed of his voice slows before he continues, presumably reflecting on the end of 2024 and Verstappen's clashes with closest championship rival Lando Norris in Mexico and at the United States GP, while there was also the contact that sent Oscar Piastri into a spin on the opening lap in Abu Dhabi.

"I was a bit frustrated watching the season play out at the front last year," he continues. "How Max was driving with regard to being harder and sort of bullying others around, showing his aggression in a manner that nobody stood up to. The only driver was Lewis; he was the only person to do that in 2021 and that was obviously such a great season. I was frustrated watching the sport last year, when there should have been such a great title battle, and it was not, so those comments in Qatar tipped me over the edge. I just thought of everything that had happened, from the on-track driving antics to where he was talking off track. It wasn't acceptable and something needed to be done."

By taking such a stance and calling out Verstappen's behaviour, Russell found himself in the firing line, not only from the world champion. Red Bull team principal Christian Horner, for his part, had labelled Russell "hysterical".

The King's Lynn racer also drew the heat from the social media trolls. It is an unwelcome part of modern society and a subject we have discussed in the past. Russell now distances himself from the comments online, but was made aware of the abuse that had been levelled at him and his team members: "I have got to be honest. I didn't see any of it myself, but I do know there was a lot of >>

George Russell

Right: Russell dominated from pole in Las Vegas last November to take his third career grand prix victory

Below right: Autosport's verdict on Russell's win in Vegas was that it proved his ability to spearhead a title charge

criticism out there. I know members of my team were receiving emails from Dutch fans. But I think that's a part of sport and life, really, isn't it? That's something we accept. And you can choose to read it and let it have an emotional impact on you – even if you laugh at the comments, then that has an impact on you.

“So I just have this view and mentality that even with the positive comments, does it actually make me drive faster? Probably not, and there are more negative than positive most of the time, so I do really try and avoid it.”

The intrusion into his private life is also something Russell has had to contend with. The telephoto lenses that stretch into the paddock are also trained on him and his girlfriend Carmen Mundt, who he has been with since late 2020. Both have had to adapt to being in the spotlight. When asked whether he is more comfortable dealing with that, Russell replies: “I’m not one who chases the attention. To be honest, when I travel, I like to be private with my family or my friends. There are certain places that you can go where you know you’ll be photographed or seen and maybe in the press, whereas I prefer to stay a little bit out of the way, because that doesn’t bring me anything, really.

“I’ve got a great group around me and my girlfriend, who’s grown with me on this journey and understands what the sport is and how it’s grown. She’s cut from a very similar cloth and that’s why we are not craving or chasing any attention. It often comes, but she handles it very well, and has her own projects she is working on and doing really well for herself. But without doubt, it has an impact not only on your life, but everyone who surrounds you.”

Russell is speaking to Autosport from Grand Cayman in the West Indies. He has been using his winter break for some training and downtime ahead of the new season as he prepares mentally and physically for the 24-race calendar that kicks off in Melbourne on 16 March. He is relaxed but also keen to point out that, ahead of such big rule changes in 2026, both he and his Mercedes team will be juggling their workload to ensure that while they have the best chance of winning titles in 2025, they are also the quickest off the line in 2026 with the new engine and aero regulations.

“I’m feeling great and I’m really excited for the season,” he affirms. “This time of year I always find really interesting, because there’s just so much excitement and unknown going into the season. We know the improvements that we’re bringing to the car. We don’t know what our rivals are doing but there is hope ahead of the new season.

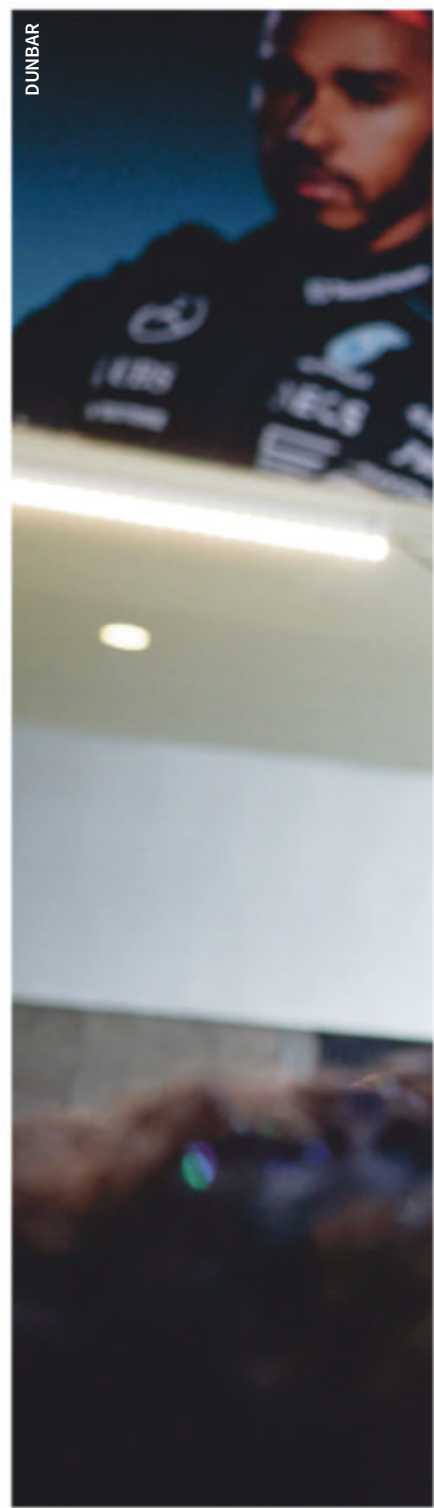
“This year has been slightly different in regard that we are also looking towards 2026. You’re usually developing the following year’s car from around July onwards. But this is very new in the sense that we’re talking a lot about the 2026 car already. We’re already discussing the power unit, the fuel, as well as development for this year. So there’s three programmes ongoing. We didn’t really talk about the engine development so much before because it was just an evolution, whereas now it’s a huge factor. Then there are two for the cars; for 2025 and one for 2026, which are just so important, so I’ve been finding that quite exciting.”

Mercedes announced that it would not be conducting its usual Silverstone shakedown ahead of the new season. Instead, it will fly the W16 to Bahrain for the pre-season test, where the car will get its first run on track. Russell says it would be wrong to “read too much into it” when asked whether this was a confident flex from the Silver Arrows, but said that there is a belief and trust in their hard work, while pointing out how the British weather had been rather unkind to testing plans in the past.

“We’ve launched for the last few seasons in Silverstone and you have to be very fortunate with the weather,” he recognises. “We had quite a bad experience one year with tremendous winds that >>



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SBLOXHAM

Left: Russell is realistic about Mercedes' title odds; "first five laps" in new car will tell him whether he'll be a contender

Below left: Antonelli needs no help on the driving side, reckons Russell, but the Brit has offered his support with off-track issues

RUSSELL IN F1

Starts	128
Wins	3
Pole positions	5
Fastest laps	8
Best champ	4th (2022)

didn't allow us to learn anything whatsoever. It was unfortunate because Red Bull were driving the track the day before we were launching and they had bright blue skies and sunshine. When you get the right conditions, you learn about the aero whereas in our last three seasons now, I am not even sure we got to use the slick tyres. So it was a day that we took nothing from.

"We just felt we're confident in the car build. We're confident we don't need to drive on a circuit that is 10 minutes from our base just in case there's any issues. We're confident that we can take it straight to Bahrain and get some proper running on that very first day of driving and at least learn something."

So is this the start of a Mercedes revival then, led by Russell himself?

"I would definitely say this is the beginning," he says with a smile. "Whether that means we're going to fight for a championship this year, I really couldn't tell you. But the same way as in 2013 that was the beginning of something new at Mercedes."

"What we have been through in the last 12 months, there has been a lot of change and a lot of restructuring within. In 2022, we were so focused on the performance and trying to recognise why it wasn't working, we didn't have time to take a step back and look at the organisation. It was during 2023 when James Allison returned, that's when we've been starting to really dig into the organisation of the team. We've got an incredible woman in Jayne Poole, who's spearheading the organisation and making sure we've got the right individuals in the right areas, and that takes time, so I think this is the start of something new."

One brand-new aspect is the promotion of Antonelli. While the 18-year-old Italian has been part of the Mercedes junior team since April 2019 and is no stranger, Russell will help play a role in his development, particularly helping with off-track elements.

"I don't think he needs any help on the driving side," reckons Russell. "It's relatively linear from F4, F3 and F2 then a slightly steeper step to F1, but what we do is racing, so that step is nothing really to be worried about. What isn't linear at all is the spotlight being upon you. When you compare it with a football player or a tennis player, you start off when you're 15, 16 or 17 and are a bit in the shadows. Then you might get a game or come off the bench. You might not play the next game but you've got a taste of it and you grow into it."

"In F1, you don't have time to grow into anything. You're not even on the bench when you're in F2, you are essentially thrown into the starting line-up – and as the main player. I've already said to Kimi, if there is any advice, anything he needs, I'm always there and more than happy to help because it's... it's a huge change."

As we conclude our conversation, Russell is asked what he is looking forward to most about 2025. His response is telling, and is one that does little to extinguish the narrative that Mercedes is feeling quietly confident. It's noted that his mood is such, but he rejects the suggestion that Mercedes could be one of the favourites for the title.

"We're not favourites," he reasons. "McLaren are for sure. Momentum is with them, Ferrari are equally likely to be strong. Realistically, I expect those two to probably be the favourites and Red Bull just behind. It will be interesting to see if that gap continues like we saw at the end of last year. But right now, the thing I'm most looking forward to is those first five laps of driving the car, because I will know within five laps if this car has a chance of fighting for a championship or not."

"That's probably the most anxious time of the whole season for me, when I'm 10 minutes before the first practice session, because those five laps are going to give you the answers of the season. Even now it's actually giving me goosebumps talking about it! I just can't wait to get driving again." ❄️



THE BIG QUESTIONS OF F1 2025

KARUN CHANDHOK

PHOTOGRAPHY **FERRARI** AND **MOTORSPORT IMAGES**

HOW WILL LEWIS HAMILTON FARE AGAINST CHARLES LECLERC'S PACE?

Everywhere I've gone in the past few weeks, the first question people ask is, 'Do you think Lewis can win at Ferrari?' The impact of the most successful driver joining the most successful team has been unprecedented, and the buzz across the global fanbase is great for the sport on the whole. But past history and hype is no guarantee of future success and, crucially, both Lewis and team boss Fred Vasseur are acutely aware of it. The marketing and communications departments will have plenty to excite them, but the number one thing that matters is the on-track performance. Charles Leclerc has always been devastatingly fast over one lap, but I feel like 2024 was his best season in terms of consistency, reducing errors, and race pace. He's developed into the title contender he wasn't ready to be in 2022. Charles is also genuinely »



Becoming team-mates is set to spur both Leclerc and Hamilton to raise their game



excited to go up against Lewis because he knows that beating the Brit could be career defining, and I think he will raise his game again.

I greatly admire Lewis for taking on the challenge as he turns 40. With the career he's had and the money he's earned, it would have been easy to tick off a couple more years at Mercedes, but he's gone for a massive legacy project to try to win Ferrari's first drivers' title for nearly 20 years. Sebastian Vettel and Fernando Alonso tried but failed and they were at an earlier stage in their careers. There were so many days in 2024 when it seemed like Hamilton wanted to be anywhere but in his Mercedes W15, and I do think that the change will reinvigorate him. If we consistently get the Hamilton magic that we saw in that final stint at Silverstone, then Leclerc – and the others – will have to watch out.

It seems odd to say this about statistically the most successful qualifier in F1 history, but Hamilton will come into this year needing to rebuild his Saturday form. If he ends up three or four cars behind Leclerc on the grid, it will be hard to recover despite any heroics he can perform on a Sunday. Leclerc is too good to let go any advantage he builds by being a few places ahead in the first stint. Qualifying could be key to Hamilton's success.

WILL McLAREN STILL HAVE THE BEST CAR?

Everything that we've seen from May's Miami Grand Prix onwards last year suggests that McLaren will start 2025 as the favourite. The team had a somewhat disappointing start to the 2024 season but, once it got its upgraded package, the cars were absolutely flying. Every upgrade that was introduced delivered results, the new wind tunnel is going at full steam, and the combination of Rob Marshall alongside the design team led by aero guru Peter Prodromou would now have cemented a much better working relationship.

The race team led by Randy Singh and Will Joseph is full of praise for the work done by the factory. When I popped down to McLaren in December, both of them were very quick to point out how much the team was focused on unlocking more lap time for the following season. There's a

very positive atmosphere at McLaren, one that comes from a no-blame, yet high-performance-driven culture that Andrea Stella has created. Yes, they celebrated the constructors' championship as they fully deserved to but, very much like Ron Dennis or Frank Williams used to do, the next day after Abu Dhabi the focus was back on the job.

Last season taught us that the level of competition is so close that we shouldn't judge the form guide for the year based on the first few races. Things can change very quickly with in-season development. The challenge for McLaren this year is that it will have reduced wind tunnel time as a result of success last year. Having 10% less than Red Bull and 15% less than Mercedes are not insignificant amounts, especially as the brain power of the aerodynamics departments will be increasingly focused on 2026.

CAN LANDO NORRIS WIN THE DRIVERS' TITLE?

If we assume that my previous answer is correct and McLaren has the fastest car, then this has got to be the year where Lando Norris starts as the title favourite for the first time in his career. History has taught us that most drivers only get one or two chances where the stars align for them to be a title contender, and you have to do everything you can to grab that opportunity. Ask Nico Rosberg about the attention to detail and sacrifices he made in 2016 when he sniffed that chance.

When Norris woke up on Sunday in Miami, he wasn't yet a race winner and was 60 points behind Max Verstappen. Fast-forward to post-Abu Dhabi and he was 63 points down. The two things I'm highlighting are that Lando lost the title in the first five weekends of 2024, when McLaren wasn't fast enough, and the team and he could have done more to win it even after that.

Dropping positions at the start or the opening lap in Spain, Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Austin and Brazil had a direct effect on Norris's points tally. The team could have done a better job in terms of communication and strategy in Canada and Silverstone as well, which cost him more points, and not being on top of the rules at Austin and in Qatar didn't help either. Critically, he and the team all know this and will be working to be better.



McLaren is busy ensuring it follows through on its status as championship favourite



Famously self-critical
Norris knows there's more
he has to do to improve



It's not pressure that sets
off Verstappen, reckons
Chandhok, it's frustration

HOW WILL MAX VERSTAPPEN REACT IF HE DOESN'T HAVE THE BEST CAR FROM THE START OF THE SEASON?

The biggest question the paddock is waiting to get answered is whether Red Bull can reset and regain its competitiveness for 2025. As last season unfolded and the RB20 became relatively less competitive, the questions around Verstappen feeling the pressure started popping up more often.

Personally, I was never a subscriber to the theory that he was feeling the pressure of the title slipping away and publicly said so many times, even though most people didn't seem to believe me! Verstappen is someone who strives for perfection and sets very high standards for

himself and everyone around him. He believes that he is the best, delivers performances worthy of that, and demands that everyone around him does the same. Combine that mentality with his no-nonsense communication style and people often mistake his brutally harsh tone with someone being under pressure. I believe that it's not pressure – it's frustration.

Leaving aside the Brazilian masterclass, the drives he put together at Barcelona, Silverstone, Zandvoort and Marina Bay when the Red Bull was not the fastest car were sublime. There's no doubt that Max pushes the boundaries on legality in terms of wheel-to-wheel racing, but Austria and Austin proved that he's intelligent enough to know where that boundary is.

The lunge at Turn 8 with Norris in Mexico and into Oscar Piastri in >>





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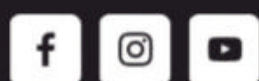
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Abu Dhabi showed that the red mist still comes down on occasion. I believe these were borne out of frustration rather than pressure. Would that happen if he had a car that was at least an equal of the opposition? Maybe not. The rules of engagement are being reviewed for 2025 but, if the RB21 is more competitive, it may not be a conversation anyway.

WILL LIAM LAWSON BE A STRONGER RED BULL DRIVER THAN SERGIO PEREZ?

The fact that Red Bull has sacked Sergio Perez makes me wonder even more why it didn't sign Carlos Sainz in the first place. Sure, his dad and Jos Verstappen didn't get on when the boys were at Toro Rosso, but that was a decade ago and, let's be honest, it's not like Christian Horner and Jos are best mates now. I would have even expected the more experienced Alex Albon to be next in the queue as Red Bull still has a historical link with him.

Throwing Liam Lawson into the lion's den without a full season of F1 experience under his belt is going to be tricky. He's a driver that I have rated very highly throughout his junior career. Like Andrea Kimi Antonelli and Ollie Bearman, I don't think Liam's F2 results on paper were a fair reflection of his talent. He's smart, fast and has shown already to be a hard racer in wheel-to-wheel combat. Liam's also got that extra fire in his belly that any young athlete who has sacrificed their home life to live halfway around the world will have (I know that feeling!). He hasn't bought his way into F1 from a super-wealthy family and is very appreciative of the opportunity that's come his way.

Psychologically he's got to approach this challenge in an Eddie Irvine circa 1996-99 sort of way. As a driver it's hard to accept this, but somehow he's got to go into this year thinking, 'I'm team-mates with the best in the business. I'm not going to beat him but I'm bloody fortunate to be in a top seat, and if I can get close to him then there will be days when the

stars align for me to win some races.'

Red Bull relied heavily on Verstappen's extraordinary talent to win the drivers' title last year. But it's also clear that his once-in-a-generation ability and car control has sent the team in a developmental direction that has been really biased towards him. This was very much what happened at Benetton in the mid-1990s where Michael Schumacher's unique style of having a pointy front end and remarkable feel and car control to balance the rear meant that all his team-mates suffered (including Max's father Jos!). When Michael left, the Enstone team went from domination with him in 1995 to winning one race in the next seven years.

Losing the constructors' title last year would have been a wake-up call to Red Bull that it needs to create a car that both drivers can handle, while obviously chasing the outright performance and downforce. By finding this overall gain, the greatest drivers will maximise it even more, but it will mean that their team-mates will be closer too. Lawson will be hoping that Red Bull goes for this approach, giving him a less poisonous chalice than his predecessors.

CAN ANDREA KIMI ANTONELLI LIVE UP TO THE HYPE AT MERCEDES?

Every single person who has seen and worked with Antonelli throughout his junior formula career tells me that he's one of the special ones. Engineers who I have known for many years and whose opinions I trust implicitly tell me that he's the best talent that they have seen in their cars since Max Verstappen. There is no doubt that he's got the talent, but is it going to be a case of too much too soon?

I still wonder whether Mercedes would have been better off doing a deal with Sainz and placing Antonelli at Williams for two seasons. James Vowles has said that he's not interested in training up drivers to send >>



Taking over Perez's seat at Red Bull requires a specific mindset for Lawson to thrive

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Securing the services of multiple race winner Sainz a major coup for Williams

elsewhere, but he also knows first-hand how talented Antonelli is from his time running the Mercedes driver academy, and two years with him would have been better than none.

I'm a bit conflicted with how I feel about Antonelli getting the top seat at Mercedes. Much like Ron Dennis with Hamilton in 2007, I really admire Mercedes for making a bold choice of a rookie; we often criticise teams for being too conservative with driver selection. On the flip side, unlike Antonelli, Dennis and Martin Whitmarsh forced Hamilton to go through every rung of the ladder until he had won the title, sometimes to Lewis's annoyance, because they knew that he was gaining valuable experience.

George Russell drove very well in 2024 and some of his qualifying performances in particular were outstanding. Mercedes has put together

an exhaustive test programme for Antonelli and he will arrive in Melbourne with plenty of miles under his belt. It's one thing pounding round and round by yourself in testing, however, and another being under the microscope of a race weekend. I actually think that in qualifying, Antonelli's natural speed will shine through against George but, as Piastri has shown, the bigger challenge for the rookies could be the relentless race pace and tyre management that the experienced drivers execute well.

WHAT CAN WE EXPECT FROM CARLOS SAINZ AT WILLIAMS?

In Las Vegas last year, I was having a conversation with Vowles around what a coup it was for him to get Sainz. We concluded that it's got to be the first time a midfield team has managed to secure a top, recent race-winning driver for the following season since Damon Hill in 1996 – ironically that was Arrows getting him from Williams!

Williams had a tough season last year. Put simply, if you spend the best part of \$10million and the man hours required to repair broken bits, that's time and money not being spent on making new go-faster bits. Alex Albon is an excellent grand prix driver, but Williams hasn't had a top-line multiple race winner since Felipe Massa retired. Sainz will bring recent knowledge of where the Williams package is lacking in comparison with the top teams, and also a strong work ethic and fresh perspective that the team will benefit from.

The wave of change at Williams cannot be underestimated. Vowles has often said that the measures he's putting in place should not be judged until 2026 and I do think that's fair. The entire process of design, manufacturing and validation is being transformed, which is a massive undertaking while still trying to go racing and cope with a significant regulatory change, let alone mend broken cars reasonably often. Haas and later Alpine quite clearly leapfrogged Williams in terms of pace as the season unfolded, which left the team in ninth, two steps back from 2023. Will it be a question of two steps back to take four steps forward? Let's give it a bit more time before judging the Vowles era of Williams. »



The consensus is Antonelli's a stellar talent, but is Merc call-up too much too soon?

WILL ASTON MARTIN REVERSE ITS DEVELOPMENT SLUMP?

The two biggest disappointments of 2024 for me were Mercedes and Aston Martin, but at least the silver cars won races and got podiums. Aston Martin went from scoring 280 points in 2023 to just 94 in 2024, a massive 572 points behind McLaren with the same power unit.

It feels like the start of Aston's slump can be traced back to Barcelona in 2023. While Fernando Alonso managed to drag three more podiums out that season, they were on weekends where it was raining in either qualifying or the race. The lack of a single podium in 2024 was one thing, but the bigger worry was the lack of progress in terms of pace as the season went on. Alonso's brilliant tenacity and consistency kept them scoring points, but both he and the Strolls will want more in 2025.

Lawrence Stroll deserves credit for putting his money where it matters. The new factory and wind tunnel are impressive and there's been a star cast of technical brains brought to the team. Mid-way through 2023, Dan Fallows was being lauded as the man who was going to do for Aston what Adrian Newey did for Red Bull 16 years earlier. Yet by the end of 2024, with the car upgrades not delivering, he was gone, with Newey himself coming to Aston.

This will be Andy Cowell's first full season in charge of the organisation. Cowell is not just an incredibly clever engineer but, if you listen to his former colleagues at Mercedes, they also talk highly about him being a very good people manager. He has already shown that he's not afraid to make the decisive changes to restructure the team by first moving Fallows on after the disappointment of the Austin upgrade, but also then promoting himself to team principal and recognising that Mike Krack's time was better spent focusing on the trackside operations.

Stroll Sr went for the big move last year of signing Newey as a minority shareholder of the team. With Newey joining after the start of the season, 2025 is very much about putting the building blocks in place for the new era beginning in 2026. Cowell and Newey are both engineers-turned-management, and their relationship with a common vision for how the team is run will be absolutely vital to Aston's future.



Cowell mixes engineering nous with reputation as fine people manager



Season of stability would help Alpine build on late-2024 performance upturn

CAN ALPINE HAVE A YEAR OF STABILITY?

The last two years at Enstone have been quite extraordinary, with a massive turnover of senior management and staff across the board. We've seen the public battle between the race team and the workers' unions of their own engine department at Viry-Chatillon play out in the grandstands at Monza, and a new Mercedes engine deal moving it away from being a works manufacturer team from 2026 onwards.

The latter point does raise the question of how long the Renault-Nissan-Mitsubishi alliance will stay in the sport purely as a branding exercise because, in terms of team valuation, it is significantly up on what it paid when it took over from Genii Capital nearly a decade ago. Once the Concorde Agreement is signed, it would be a good time to package it up for sale, and certainly a fully functioning race team with plans to upgrade the wind tunnel and simulator on site, plus a Mercedes engine contract for the new generation, will make it an appealing proposition.

As far as the race team is concerned, this is the first off-season that Oliver Oakes and Flavio Briatore have been in charge together, and Oakes has started bringing in his trusted lieutenants into senior roles, including Dave Greenwood as racing director. This is also the first winter that David Sanchez will be leading the technical department, after joining in May last year.

Judging by all the noises I've heard from engineers on the race team and in the factory, Sanchez has had a very positive and calming influence, offering a degree of practical and pragmatic thinking that has helped the team across the board. The 2025 car will be a carryover of last year's chassis but the trend of performance, especially from Pierre Gasly in the final third of the season, indicates that there is untapped potential that the team can extract as it lays the blocks in place for a new era in 2026.



WHICH F1 ROOKIE IS UNDER MOST PRESSURE IN 2025?

After a year in which we started the season with no changes to the grid, I love the fact that we not only have 80% of the teams with a new line-up for 2025 but also almost one third of the drivers will be full-season rookies. Of course Lawson, Ollie Bearman and Jack Doohan have done some races, but being dropped into a seat in the middle of the season is completely different to having a full winter and pre-season to prepare for the year ahead.

There's nowhere to hide in F1, and all of a sudden every sector of every lap will be analysed and judged by people in the commentary boxes as well as millions of others at home. Drivers such as Hamilton, Verstappen, Leclerc and Piastri have raised the bar in terms of expectations for a rookie. There's

really not much grace period afforded to drivers anymore, and I guess nor should there be – F1 isn't a finishing school, you're there because you're ready to fight with the best, albeit with some slack to gain experience.

Gabriel Bortoleto, Bearman and Isack Hadjar will be less under the spotlight since they're not in top seats, while nobody is realistically expecting Lawson to blow Verstappen away. This means that the rookies under the most pressure are undoubtedly Antonelli and Doohan. The Italian is not only coming into F1 with a top team and the biggest amount of hype from this group, but has also had the best preparation in terms of testing mileage to prepare. With Alpine signing Franco Colapinto, Doohan has already been given a warning that he needs to look over his shoulder. I really love to see rookie drivers come in and do well, and I genuinely hope that this cohort can seize their opportunity to deliver on track. 🏎️



Ollie Bearman



TIME TO BEAR FRUIT

Ollie Bearman is gearing up for his first full F1 season as a Haas driver.

*We caught up with him at Autosport International to hear how
he's settling in at the team – and with Esteban Ocon*

ALEX KALINAUCKAS

As he hustled the Haas onto the main straight of the Autodromo Hermanos Rodriguez one last time, Ollie Bearman was about to prove a Formula 1 world champion wrong. It was the end of FP1 at the 2023 Mexican Grand Prix, Bearman's first appearance on an F1 weekend, alongside Nico Hulkenberg. And Jenson Button was in the Sky Sports F1 commentary box. "Nico in the end went a second quicker than his young team-mate, which is tough," offered Button. "Nico knows the tyres, knows how to cool them down for another flier. And Bearman, not so much... Oh."

On a soft-tyre qualifying simulation late on, Bearman was all over the kerbs, slow, and Button and his fellow commentators were soon expounding on the perils of overdriving at this gripless, high-altitude venue. The subtext sang of how he was trying too hard to impress.

But Bearman wasn't done. After a cooldown lap, he went again – and went quicker. Race engineer Mark Slade had been able to tell Bearman that he was losing time to Hulkenberg in the fast, flowing middle sector. And then there it was. The lap was not as quick as it would have been had he nailed it when the tyres were brand-new, but was good enough to stop the patronising from the ex-pros.

Did Ayao Komatsu see Bearman as a future F1 driver that day? "Straight away," said the Japanese, who at the time was engineering chief of Haas before rising to the team principal role. "I've seen some rookie drivers who come into an FP1 session and are quick, but those guys are really focused on proving they're quick. Ollie wasn't that at all. He really understood what his role was in that session in Mexico and what the team needed.

"He made a mistake. But he was able to really digest what he'd done and collect it for the next push lap. Even with those four laps, just how quickly he learned, the debrief, the calmness and the way he could explain things working with the team, everything – I just couldn't believe he was 18."

That was step one towards Bearman opening the

2025 Autosport International show, a byproduct of his subsequent graduation to a race seat, and where we're catching up with him before he speaks live on stage to a crowd packed with fans clutching his merchandise. Step two was his stand-in drive for his benefactors at Ferrari in Jeddah last year. With just one practice session under his belt before qualifying, Bearman brought the indisposed Carlos Sainz's Ferrari home with six points on that dangerously fast street track.

Haas was now convinced to get him on board full-time for 2025. There is a suggestion from some quarters that, had Komatsu been in charge earlier at the squad, Bearman might already be a year into his F1 career. But in any case, the stars now align well enough. Haas has a driver it long believed in and has proved he can perform at the highest level under intense pressure. And, with Bearman retaining his Ferrari links as Maranello evaluates whether he could be the next Charles Leclerc, Haas sources suggest the Banbury team is saving cash by not having to pay his wages this year.

It aligns perfectly with Komatsu and co still needing to show team owner Gene Haas that his squad can succeed within its existing infrastructure. That's in the hope of getting further additional funding in the future, and the American was mulling a decision on whether to upgrade the Banbury facility or even move to a new one as Autosport closed for press.

"I can't wait to get going," bubbles Bearman in the belly of Birmingham's National Exhibition Centre, the 19-year-old a bundle of enthusiasm. "I feel like I've had so long to prepare for this. It's been since Silverstone last year when I had my announcement [that he would be racing for Haas in 2025]. Of course, I knew slightly before that as well. I've been counting down the months."

Handily puncturing that wait – around seeing out a second successive season in Formula 2 with Prema Racing, where Bearman was frustrated he couldn't show better in a staccato campaign amid his squad struggling with the new-spec car – were two more F1 cameos. Kevin Magnussen's one-race ban meant Bearman stood in for the Azerbaijan GP, and the Dane's illness in Brazil gave him a third GP start.

Baku was an extension of Jeddah – he impressed overall. But the soaking Interlagos race featured several spills, although at least he finished with a perfect 3-0 qualifying head-to-head over Hulkenberg (including the Brazil sprint session). While that last appearance made Bearman too experienced to take the rookie driver slot alongside incoming Haas driver Esteban Ocon in the post-season Abu Dhabi test, the team figured it would be more beneficial to experience the Interlagos circuit – as well as race an F1 car in the wet.

Besides, Haas has unleashed its first Testing of Previous Cars (TPC) programme, with Bearman getting 250 miles of running at Jerez with Ocon in late January. He views this as a chance to "get sharp again", while for Komatsu "it was good to build an understanding with his race engineer [Slade's replacement Ronan O'Hare]".

Komatsu feels this early work in private can "make a huge difference" as 2025 kicks off. The new Bearman-O'Hare pairing, he says, is already "communicating >>



GALLOWAY/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



“How quickly he learned, the debrief, the calmness – I just couldn’t believe he was 18”

Above: Bearman headlined Autosport International

Below: quality of Mexico 2023 FP1 performance belied rookie status and left big impression on Komatsu (left)





BOTH: HONE/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



“I just want to focus on myself, build my mental strength, build my consistency as a driver”



ASENOV/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Above: GP winner Ocon’s experience is a resource that Bearman is keen to tap into

Below: young Brit owned his errors in Brazil last year, then crucially didn’t dwell on them

pretty well". But, considering the early impact he made last year, what would a successful first full season mean to Bearman? "I just want to focus on myself," he replies. "Build my mental strength, build my consistency as a driver, and just be happy with my season. I want to keep improving, keep getting better, all of the aspects that are going to make me a good driver. I just want to work on them and get ready to stay in F1."

One big gauge for that will be how he stacks up against Ocon. The Frenchman is an F1 race winner, has scored four podiums, and over the course of last season edged his former team-mate Pierre Gasly on average qualifying pace by just 0.031s. Before the Jerez test, they'd barely spoken beyond brief paddock meetings and, says Bearman, "a few texts".

Here, it's worth noting that when Bearman rocked up in Baku, Haas insiders say Hulkenberg was initially inclined to present a cool front. But Bearman cracked the ice and before long the pair were getting along well – Hulkenberg, 15 years since he last had the problem, delighting night owl Bearman in explaining how F1 drivers can sleep in compared to their F2 counterparts.

Komatsu says Bearman and Ocon got on "pretty good" during their one day together in Spain, where Bearman again sampled the Haas VF-23 before handing over to Toyota driver Ritomo Miyata for several runs late in the day, with Ocon taking over for the following day.

"Esteban was very happy," Komatsu continues. "He said that was the most efficient, productive day of testing, even though it's not like full-blown testing. The main focus was teamwork – just working together with new engineers, mechanics, etc, and getting used to the Ferrari power unit. But in terms of how the days ran, how we communicated, he said that was the best test that he's had, which was bit surprising!"

That represents a positive first step with a new team – at least in terms of public utterances – for a driver who was effectively dumped early from his old one at Alpine following yet another tempestuous relationship with a team-mate exploding. It was Ocon's Monaco collision with Gasly that already had him heading for the exit, well before he was eventually moved aside so that Jack Doohan could drive in the 2024 finale.

How Ocon and Bearman gel will define Haas's next phase. Komatsu insists he's not prepared to accept "any team-mate contacts, DNFs" because of tensions between them. He will establish that "rules of engagement have to be totally clear from day one", and says this "will be clarified before the first race".

At this stage, Ocon must get the benefit of the doubt that his standing against Bearman won't detonate as it did with Gasly – and before that Sergio Perez at Force India and Fernando Alonso, also at Alpine. It would also be a tactical misstep for any driver to rock up at a new team and cause spectacular instability with team-mate friendly fire. Initially, at least.

But there's more for Bearman to consider when it comes to taking on Ocon. He's under no illusions about how good his new team-mate is – after all, he only had to ask around at Prema. The Italian powerhouse took Ocon to the 2014 European Formula 3 title ahead of a field that

included Max Verstappen, so knows his talent level well.

"Everyone tells me he's very quick," says Bearman, twice a finalist in the Aston Martin (now Silverstone) Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year Award.

"I know from Rene [Rosin, his old team boss] and the people at Prema what he's like as a driver. I'm looking forward to racing him. I know he'll be tough, but I think every team-mate's tough in their own way. The number one goal of a driver is to beat their team-mate. So that's, of course, in his mind and in my mind as well.

"But my goal is just to learn from him. He has a lot of experience in F1 and I want to kind of use that and take any tips he has to try and understand his driving style and stuff. Clearly he's very fast, so I want to try and use that as much as I can. I don't think he's unfair. As a team-mate... that's not how it is. I think we're going to have a good relationship and I'm just excited to see how it develops."

That can be read in two ways. Some might view Bearman's take as naivety, but what else is he supposed to say at this stage? What stands out through every conversation with his management team and those he's already impressed at Haas is how he can quickly shake off mistakes such as those in Mexico and Brazil. That should put him in good stead to not overthink his upcoming team-mate battle.

Bearman also reveals that he and Ocon "have the same ideas about the car – what we like, what we dislike, which is always a nice thing". That can be a considerable boon to Haas when it comes to developing its 2025 challenger. If intra-team harmony can be maintained after all...

"Honestly, with Esteban, with Ollie, these are two very good drivers," Komatsu concludes. "They've both got a lot more to prove, yeah. But it's funny about Ollie being a rookie, I don't treat him as a rookie. Every time he gets in the car, his feedback's been excellent. The approach has been excellent, speed has been great. You saw in Baku and Interlagos, both qualifying sessions he outqualified Nico, who was our reference. So I think we've got a very good combination. Really looking forward to it." ❄



NOW
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MARCH 701



*The last privateer
grand prix winner sits
at the heart of a fascinating
story of what-might-have-beens*

STUART CODLING

PHOTOGRAPHY JAMES MANN



Designed and built in just three months, unloved by its own creator and actively disliked by those tasked with driving it, the March 701 nevertheless sits at a fascinating nexus of history. Had those sitting at the table played their cards differently, the car now chiefly notable for being the last privateer entry to win a grand prix could have been a Formula 1 constructors' title winner... and Jochen Rindt might have seen the day he was crowned champion.

Granted, this is stretching the premise somewhat. The March 701 is by no means the car Robin Herd would have designed had he taken the other route when life presented him with what he described as "a fork in the road" in mid-1969.

The two prongs of that fork, would you believe it, were Max Mosley and Bernie Ecclestone. At just 30 years old, Herd was considered one of motor racing's most gifted young technicians, a career trajectory beginning with a double-first in physics and engineering at Oxford and taking in stints working on Concorde, designing McLaren's innovative composite-chassis M2A and grand prix-winning M7A, and superintending Cosworth's four-wheel-drive F1 car. When the arrival of wings and fatter tyres rendered 4WD a dead end, Herd was open to offers.

Enter Mosley, a contemporary of Herd at Oxford, by now a barrister – and sometime F2 racer in a car prepared by Frank Williams. Herd and Mosley became reacquainted at Frank's workshop in Slough when Robin was engaged to convert the Brabham BT26 that Williams had acquired for Piers Courage to accommodate a Cosworth DFV.

One of the many appeals the world of motor racing held »

for Mosley was that its insular inhabitants either didn't know or didn't care that he was the son of the notorious British Union of Fascists leader. A chance meeting blossomed into a proposal for Herd to join the new racing car company Mosley envisioned.

Mosley's project came together with F2 racer and future Arrows F1 boss Alan Rees joining alongside engineer and amateur F3 racer Graham Coaker, whose garage became the nascent enterprise's first production facility. Since time and money were tight, Herd's first design would be an F3 car cobbled together with Lotus and Brabham parts – but Mosley's ambition was to hit F1 as soon as possible. To this end he travelled to Switzerland to pitch the project to Rindt in person, fully aware that having an exciting talent signed up would make attracting the necessary finance an easier task.

Rindt entertained the proposal but, balancing the knowns of Lotus against the unknowns of a new company still operating from a residential address, declared he had no intention of racing a car built in "Graham's shack", his accent and dismissive tone rendering the phrase as "grem's sheck". Undeterred, the founders ploughed on and briefly named their project 'Gremshek Engineering' before alighting on March – a collection of their initials – when they came to file the paperwork at Companies House.

Ecclestone, Rindt's manager, also had a pitch for Herd to consider. As disappointments piled up in F1 – slow Coopers, unreliable Brabhams, fast but fragile Lotuses – the Austrian was often at his happiest in F2 with Roy Winkelmann's eponymous operation. His team-mate (later team manager) Rees was a schoolfriend of Herd's. Among the plates Ecclestone was spinning in 1969, besides the question of whether Rindt should stay at Lotus or return to Brabham for the following F1 season, was a putative Winkelmann-run F1 campaign – which would require a car.

"When my attempt to recruit Jochen reached Bernie's ears," wrote Mosley in his autobiography, "he realised that Robin was planning to leave Cosworth to be the designer and partner in a new F1 team. He immediately tried to persuade Robin to go in with him and Jochen. This would be a much better way, he said, to start a new team.

"Bernie had some good arguments: he had money, we didn't; and in Jochen he had the driver everyone thought was the quickest around, with the possible exception of Jackie Stewart. Fortunately for the March project, Robin's response was that he had agreed a deal and was not prepared to go back on it..."

Winkelmann's team stayed where it was and Rindt remained with Lotus for the 1970 F1 season, the consequences of which are well documented.

Each of March's founders agreed to put in £2500 – Mosley borrowed from his mother, while Herd and Rees had bet on Stewart to win the world championship. Within weeks of moving into new premises in Bicester, the F3 car was ready for the up-and-coming Ronnie Peterson to introduce it to the world – in the heady heights of the Lincolnshire International Trophy at Cadwell Park in late September.

It was a close-run result... between Brabham-mounted Tim Schenken and Howden Ganley. Peterson was third, 16 seconds in arrears, ahead of James Hunt. Given Peterson's spectacular form in a humdrum Tecno earlier

MARCH 701

NOW THAT WAS A CAR

in the season, this was considered a decent result rather than a great one. The following weekend Peterson had an altercation with a straw bale at Montlhéry and rolled the car, whereupon it caught fire and, with only one marshal on hand to douse the flames, Peterson would have met his maker without the intervention of mechanic Ray Wardell.

Still, Mosley went all-in on the F1 project – in a flurry of misdirection and sleight-of-hand of which Ecclestone, soon to become a lifelong associate and chum, would be proud. A month later Mosley announced a multi-car F1 programme with Chris Amon and Jo Siffert driving works cars, a singular coup since Amon had been Ferrari's lead driver in F1 before quitting the team, and Siffert was all set to take his place until Porsche, not wanting to lose him to Ferrari in sportscars, offered £30,000 to any team that would take him instead.

Though perhaps not considered a top-line F1 driver by some, Siffert had won a grand prix in a Rob Walker-run Lotus 49 and was arguably Ferrari's best option until Jacky Ickx decided to return. The following edition of Autosport, 13 November 1969, also reported that the Tyrrell team would purchase three Marches: a spare alongside one for reigning world champion Stewart and another for a then-undecided team-mate. There was talk, too – put about by Mosley – of further orders from Ford of Germany to run Rolf Stommelen, and another car for Peterson.

"The F1 set-up is completely separate from the manufacturing side, which is already well under way with F2, F3 and FB production, and several orders have been taken," concluded the entry in Pit & Paddock. Here the source was being economical with the actualité, for Coaker would soon begin to chafe at the F1 project sapping resource and energy from customer chassis production, and in 1971 was the first of the founders to leave.

Others in the motor racing firmament failed to share Mosley's – and Autosport's – optimism. Paddock wits suggested the company acronym stood for Much Advertised Racing Car Hoax. Tyrrell, forced to the customer-car altar by its schism with Matra, quietly drew up plans for a car of its own.

Speculation turned to whether March would have any cars ready for the 6 February launch date that Mosley had put about. But Herd was working 24/7 at March's newly rented Bicester workshops and, though the final product bore ample evidence of its rushed gestation, not just one but two chassis were ready for shakedown at Silverstone as advertised – but this wasn't the only significant development for the new F1 contender.

Amon duly appeared on the cover of Autosport's 12 February 1970 issue testing the new March 701 with large STP stickers on the nose and rear wing. This was no hoax. As Quentin Spurring reported within, not only was STP Corporation sponsoring the works team, but it was buying and entering its own car for Mario Andretti, 1969 Indianapolis 500 winner in an STP-sponsored Hawk. STP president Andy Granatelli himself ("just about the most controversial figure in motor racing anywhere") was on hand to explain his thinking.

In period, the arrival of a seemingly major sponsor – and a rather brash, American one with it – was little short of a sensation, for it brought worrisome connotations of US »



**“MOSLEY WENT ALL-IN ON THE F1 PROJECT –
IN A FLURRY OF MISDIRECTION AND SLEIGHT-OF-HAND”**



Herd, Rees, Coaker and Mosley
(left to right) with their new baby

PHIPPS



Stewart celebrates 701's
only GP win at Jarama

SCHLEGELMILCH



Stewart takes our model from the studio shoots –
701 chassis 4 – to second place at Zandvoort

PHIPPS



Stewart gives the 701 its first
victory in the Race of Champions



Amon, here on pole, then went on to secure another
non-championship win at International Trophy

PHOTOGRAPHY: MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Max Mosley (left) with fellow
March founder Alan Rees

commercial arrangements. This was just two calendar years on from purists having to reach for the smelling salts when South African equipe Team Gunston had the audacity to paint its private entries for its home grand prix in the colours of its tobacco sponsor, followed a few weeks later by Team Lotus doing likewise with Gold Leaf. For many fans, deviation from national racing colours remained tantamount to blasphemy.

“The thought of a gridful of Formula 1 cars at Silverstone for the British GP with names like Kokonut Kandy Special and Give Him Fojo New Doggie Food-Ford might be repugnant,” wrote Spurring with a palpable shudder, “but it could happen.” We really must give ‘Q’ a ring and see what he made of the operation that briefly sailed under the flag of Aston Martin Aramco Cognizant Formula 1 Team.

Both Amon and Siffert drove the works car on the day, and there was confirmation that Peterson would indeed get his F1 opportunity in a 701 “entered privately from Sweden” (the reality behind Mosley’s bluster here would prove rather different). Stewart and newly announced team-mate Johnny Servoz-Gavin evaluated the other car, already painted in Tyrrell’s Elf-mandated blue colours. JYS bridled against the lack of elbow room in the cockpit; this would come to rank among the lesser negatives he expressed about the 701.

Nevertheless, the reality for Tyrrell was to take the March or have no car at all, at least for the beginning of the season. For although its in-house project remained a closely guarded secret, and still in the early stages of coming together in Derek Gardner’s spare bedroom and garage in Leamington Spa, it was widely known that Brabham, McLaren and BRM had turned down approaches to provide

MARCH 701

NOW
THAT
WAS
A
CAR

a car. After all, why supply a rival? If Herd had taken the fork in the road that led to Ecclestone, Tyrrell would have had to sit out the beginning of the 1970 season or try to whistle the De Tomaso out from under Frank Williams.

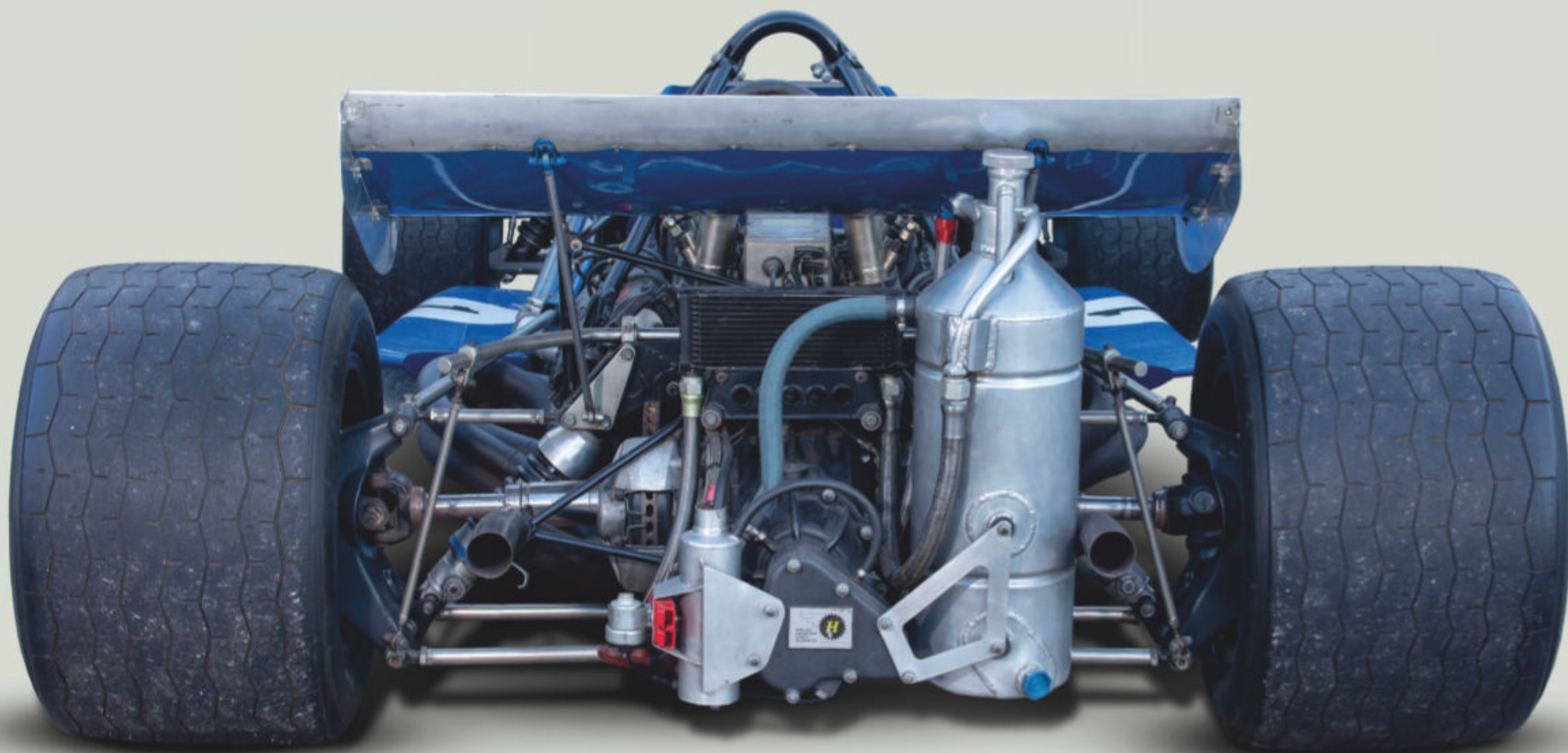
Autosport technical editor John Bolster and photographer Peter Burn were also granted the kind of access unthinkable in the current era: not just a trip to the factory and an opportunity to interview the principals, but also to see and capture part-built monocoques up close. Bolster was particularly enthusiastic about the 701’s signature feature, a “low-aspect aerofoil for turbulent conditions, mounted along each side of the body.

“These two deep-bellied projections, made of glassfibre reinforced with carbon fibres, have ample space for any extra tankage required. As the car itself carries 40 gallons of fuel, this will be sufficient for some races, but an extra 10 gallons will be hidden in the aerofoils for the tougher events. Whether the extra tankage is required or not, it is likely to be advantageous to carry the aerofoils on any circuit.”

Herd later admitted that his claim for these devices mitigating turbulence was pure nonsense. In fact, the aerofoils – designed by Peter Wright of Specialised Mouldings – were there for the purpose of generating negative pressure underneath the car’s floor. Given the lack of ‘seal’ to the underfloor and their position in the messy wake of the front wheels, it’s unlikely they had any effect at all, but Wright would get there later in the decade at Lotus.

Herd would later describe the 701 as “nothing like the car I wanted to build” since the compressed design period required corners to be cut. Had he taken the other fork in the road – to Ecclestone – in the summer of 1969, he reckoned >>

“FOR MANY FANS, DEVIATION FROM NATIONAL RACING COLOURS REMAINED TANTAMOUNT TO BLASPHEMY”



the finished car would have been more like the 711 chassis he designed for March in 1971. Indubitably the 701 was a belt-and-braces project rather flattered by Bolster's generous write-up in Autosport.

But, equally, it arrived at a time when its shortcomings were mitigated by a tyre-development war and other teams – notably Ferrari and Lotus – introducing new technical concepts that took time to show their potential. It also, arguably, did grand prix racing a favour in an era of patchy entries: just 13 F1 cars had started the previous season's German GP at the Nurburgring.

Just as corners had to be cut during the development phase, though, lack of funds meant economies had to be made throughout the season. Straight after the 701 launch, the cars were freighted to South Africa for tyre testing ahead of the first round of the season at Kyalami. While Stewart circulated on Dunlops, Firestone was underwriting the cost of March's travel. "At one point Robin, who was anxiously waiting for some parts," recalled Mosley, "sent me a telex saying their failure to arrive was 'screwing the whole issue'. I sent him one back saying if we didn't get the miles done for Firestone, there wouldn't be an issue left to screw."

While Stewart would later rank the 701 among the worst F1 cars he raced, he duly qualified on pole for the season opener with Amon alongside, and led for a time after Rindt hit Amon and Jack Brabham at the first corner. Thereafter he fell behind Brabham, Denny Hulme and Bruce McLaren as his 701's pendulous handling became increasingly wayward, salvaging a podium when McLaren's engine let go.

MARCH 701

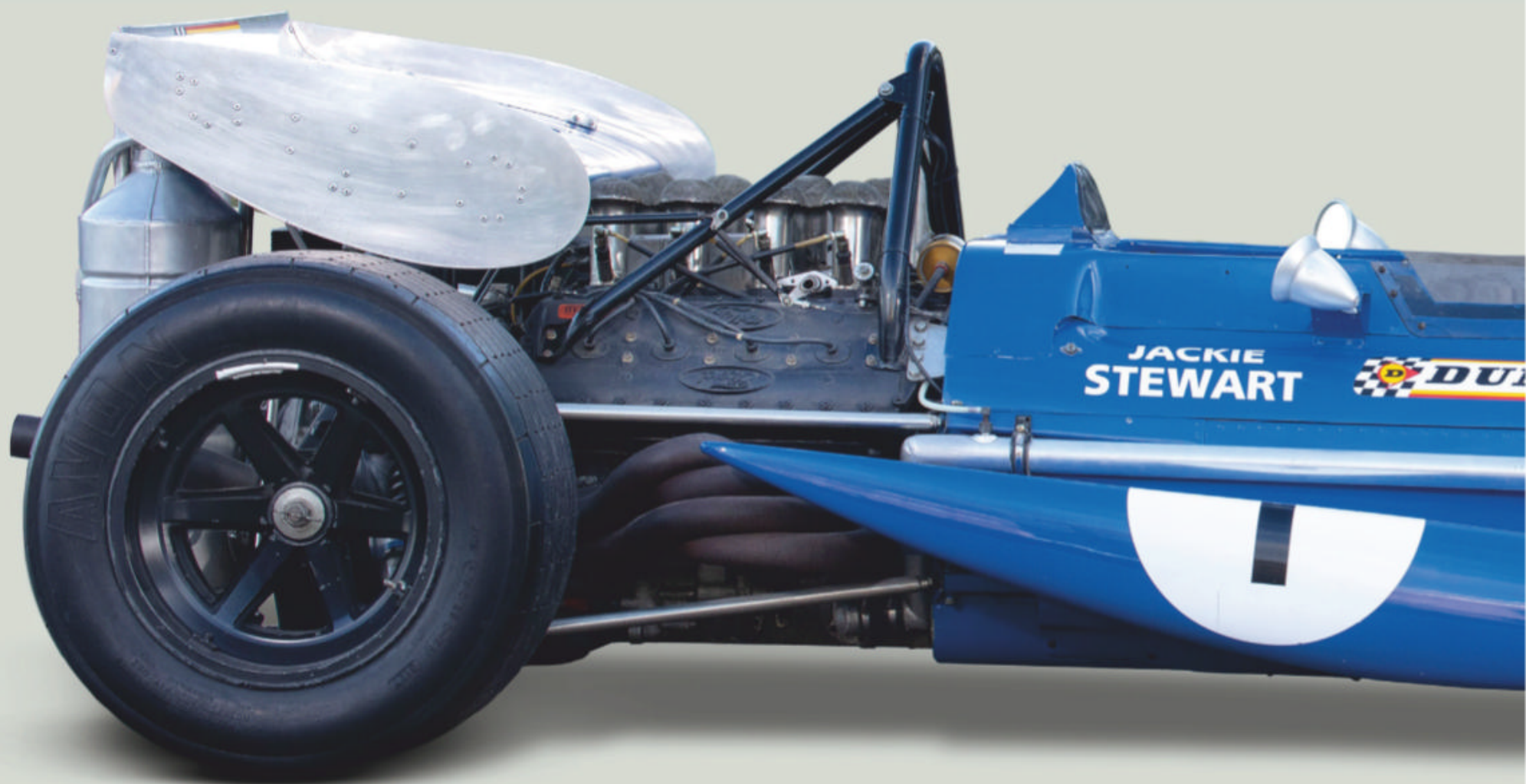
NOW THAT WAS A CAR

In the somewhat less balmy environs of Brands Hatch at the end of March, Stewart won the Race of Champions by over half a minute from Rindt, though of course Jochen was labouring with an elderly Lotus 49 ahead of the 72's much-anticipated debut. March's first race win had come much earlier than many sceptics had anticipated – perhaps even Stewart – since Brabham led until suffering an ignition problem three laps from the flag. Amon secured another non-championship victory at the BRDC International Trophy at Silverstone, setting pole and winning heat one while Stewart won the second.

The 701 was hitting its peak. A week before Silverstone, at the unloved Jarama circuit near Madrid, Brabham set pole with Stewart third and Amon sixth. Servoz-Gavin and Andretti were lucky to join the show after a spat between the teams and the organisers over how many cars could start; Siffert was one of four drivers escorted off the grid along with their cars by baton-wielding police. On the opening lap there was an unfortunate coming-together between the previous year's Le Mans winners when Jackie Oliver's BRM broke a driveshaft and arrived at the apex of an infield left-hander sideways, collecting the Ferrari 312B of Jacky Ickx and precipitating a fireball. This being 1970, the race continued regardless and Stewart, who had already seized the lead, ran on to win by a lap from McLaren and Andretti. Just five cars finished.

March's first grand prix win as a constructor also stands as the last for a private entry, since Tyrrell had yet to become a constructor. When it did, it happily parked its Marches

“THE RESULT WAS A DISCOMBOBULATING LURCH FROM UNDERSTEER TO OVERSTEER, PARTICULARLY IN SLOWER CORNERS”



before selling them on as a new era began.

Aside from being around 15kg too heavy, the 701's key weakness was its dumbbell-style weight distribution, a consequence of Herd having to use an off-the-shelf radiator at the front. Having already designed the fuel tank slightly too small for some circuits – hence the need for auxiliaries in the sidepods – Herd tried to balance the car out by locating the oil in a tank slightly aft of the rear axle. The result was a queasy and discombobulating lurch from understeer to oversteer, particularly in slower corners. It was disconcertingly bouncy over bumps, too.

Inferior to Brabham's BT33 straight out of the box, the 701 had little runway for development given its simplicity and, once the Ferrari 312B and Lotus 72 came on song, opportunities to shine were few – not helped by budget-enforced 'stretching' of component life. Peterson, signed up to a three-year works deal only to be displaced by Siffert when Porsche's wallet hove into view, joined the grid from Monaco onwards in a satellite entry run by Colin Crabbe's Antique Automobiles organisation. The DFV in his 701 was the same unit that had been in the back of the McLaren M7B written off by Vic Elford at the Nurburgring the previous year. There was no budget for a rebuild, so Peterson had to nurse it all year.

This is the prism through which we must view the late Herd's spurious claim that Amon was only beaten to second place at Spa by Pedro Rodriguez because the winning BRM had an illegal 3.3-litre engine. Dispirited by lack of development, operational budget and salary (long into retirement, he would regale interviewers with details of how Mosley only paid him the first £25,000 instalment of a promised £100,000), Amon quit at the end of the season.

After leading the constructors' championship early on, March slid to third, a position it would never better in subsequent years despite achieving much success in other categories. Perhaps more significantly for the F1 world, during that time Mosley and Ecclestone ceased to be presenters of alternate opportunities, very much working hand-in-glove... ❀

RACE RECORD

Starts	64
Wins	1
Pole positions	3
Fastest laps	1
Podiums	7
Championship points	48



SPECIFICATION

Chassis	Aluminium monocoque
Suspension	Double wishbones with outboard coil-over dampers
Engine	Ford Cosworth DFV V8
Engine capacity	2993cc
Power	400bhp @ 9000rpm
Gearbox	Hewland DG300 five-speed manual
Brakes	Steel discs
Tyres	Firestone, Dunlop, Goodyear
Weight	565kg
Notable drivers	Jackie Stewart, Chris Amon, Mario Andretti, Ronnie Peterson, Francois Cevert



When a shooting star burned out

*In an extract from the book **Forever Young: Six Lost Talents of Motor Racing**, released this month, Ian Wagstaff recalls the life and career of Chris Bristow*

IAN WAGSTAFF

TONY ROBINSON WAS NOT EASILY IMPRESSED. He had been a mechanic for Stirling Moss working alongside the legendary Alf Francis on Moss's Maserati 250F. With the retirement the previous year of Juan Manuel Fangio, Stirling was now, unquestionably, the world's leading racing driver. In addition to its owner, the 250F had been driven by others when he was not available, among them the recently deceased reigning world champion Mike Hawthorn. It was small wonder, therefore, that it was difficult to impress Robinson; he had worked with some great drivers. Yet, at Brands Hatch in mid-1959, he was certainly enthralled by what he was seeing. The result would be that a shooting star blazed briefly over the motor racing world, only to be extinguished just over a year later.

By 1959, the wiry Robinson had risen to become chief mechanic of the British Racing Partnership, a team established the year before to run initially in Formula 2 by Moss's father, Alfred, and his manager, the ambitious Ken Gregory. Now it was running two cars, Cooper-Borgward T51s, for Ivor Bueb and George Wicken. Despite the fact that the former had won the Le Mans 24 Hours twice, neither could really be described as front rank.

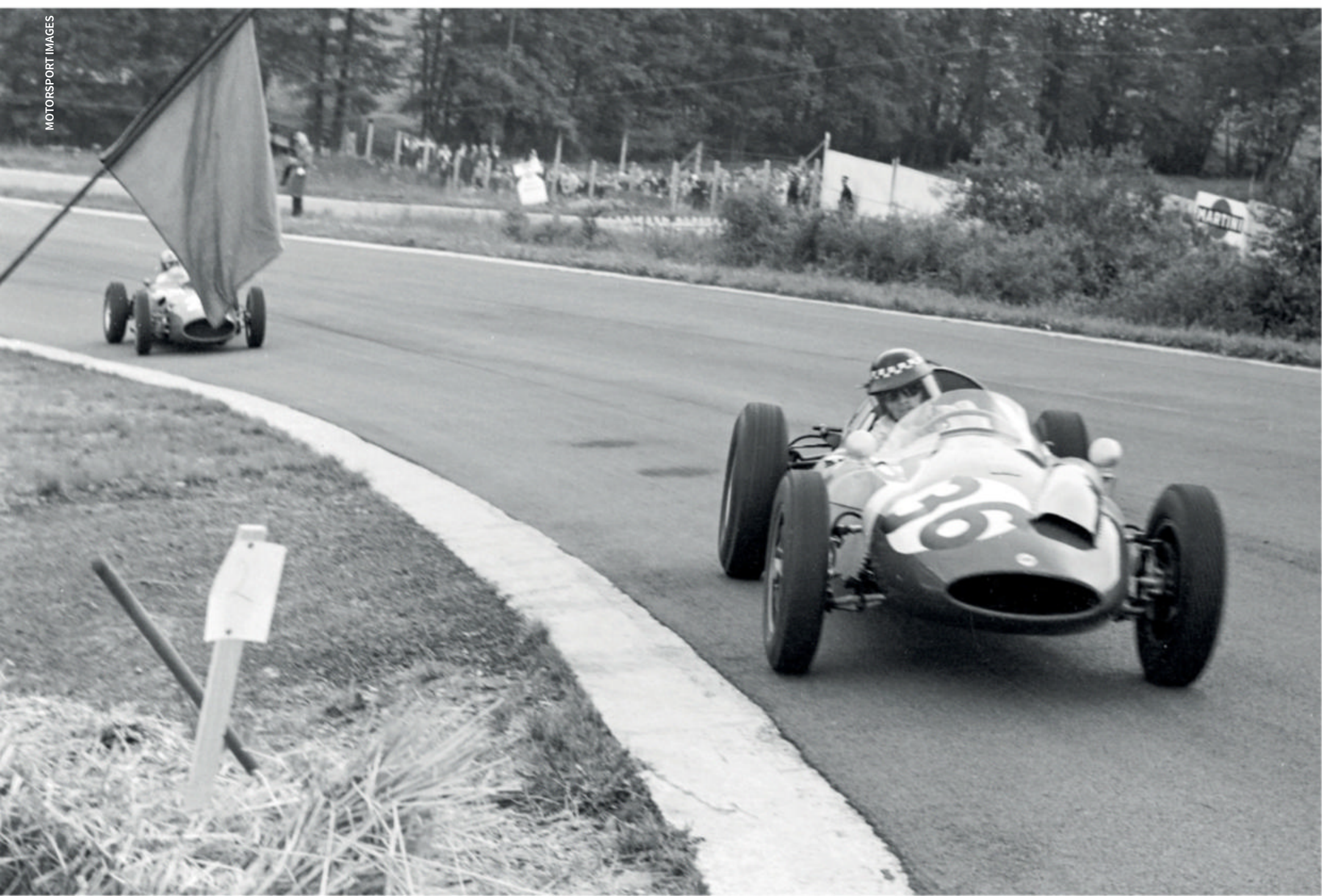
On the day in question Robinson was present at Brands Hatch testing with Bueb. He felt that, as the season progressed, Wicken was not getting the best from the car. "George was a mistake," recalled Gregory. Out on the track and going perhaps faster, frighteningly so, than he should have been able to in a one-off Formula 2 special was a youngster who Robinson thought could be an ideal replacement for Wicken.

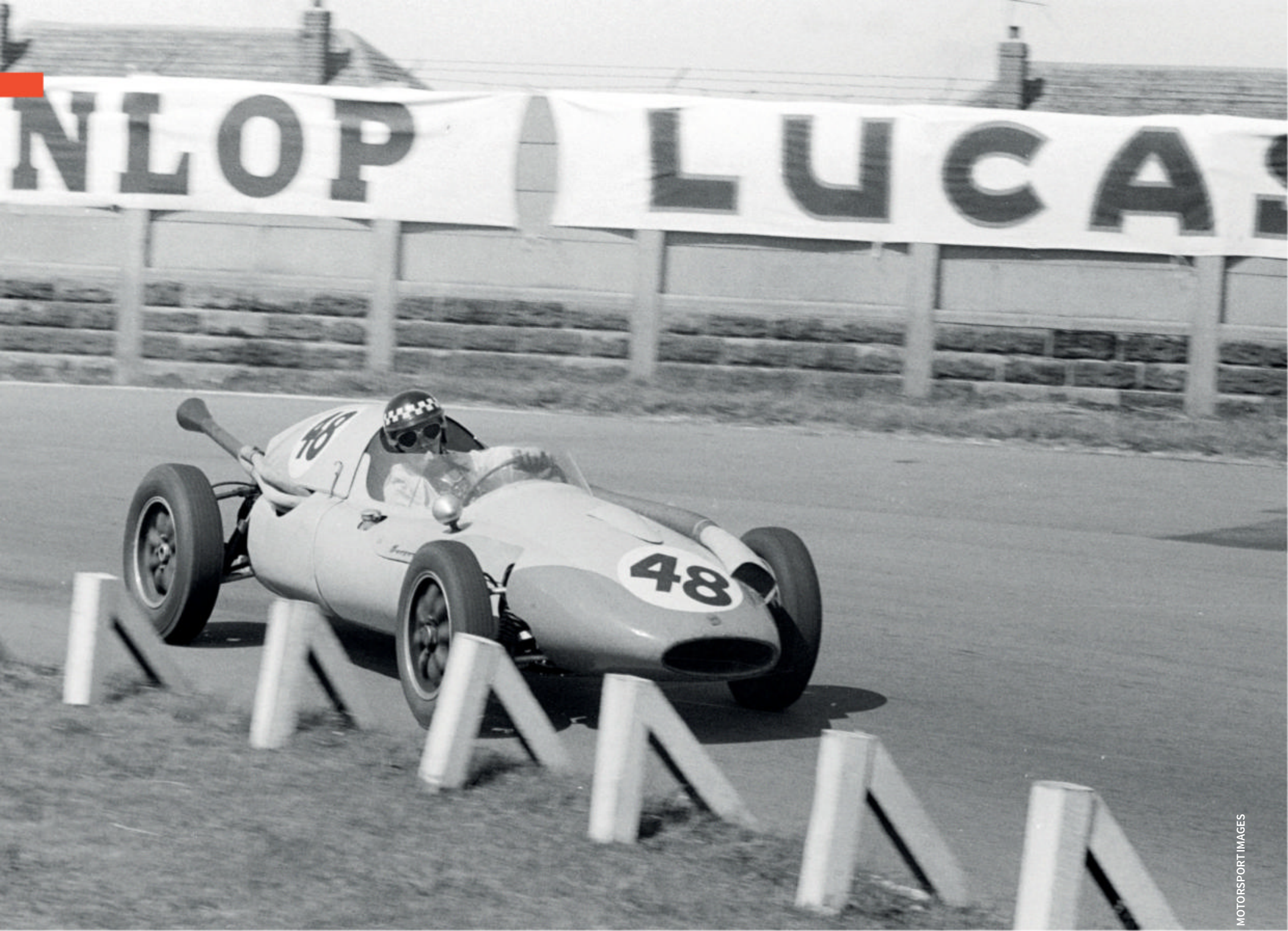
The driver impressing him was Chris Bristow, from Streatham, south London, who would go on to become Robinson's protege. Tony, a Londoner himself, reckoned that he had 'by accident' discovered the answer to BRP's dilemma. "Chris's rapid tidy driving was very impressive, as was his approach in general around the paddock," he recalled. "He always seemed relaxed and interested in other teams."

Bristow's car at the time was the bulbous Formula 2 Hume-Cooper that had originally been his Cooper T39 centre-seat sportscar, and which John 'Boots' Hume had converted into a Climax FPF-engined open-wheeler with lowered suspension and left-hand gear change. Although it looked more like a Formula 2 Porsche, the Hume was similar to a conventional Cooper and drew attention to Bristow's driving. >>

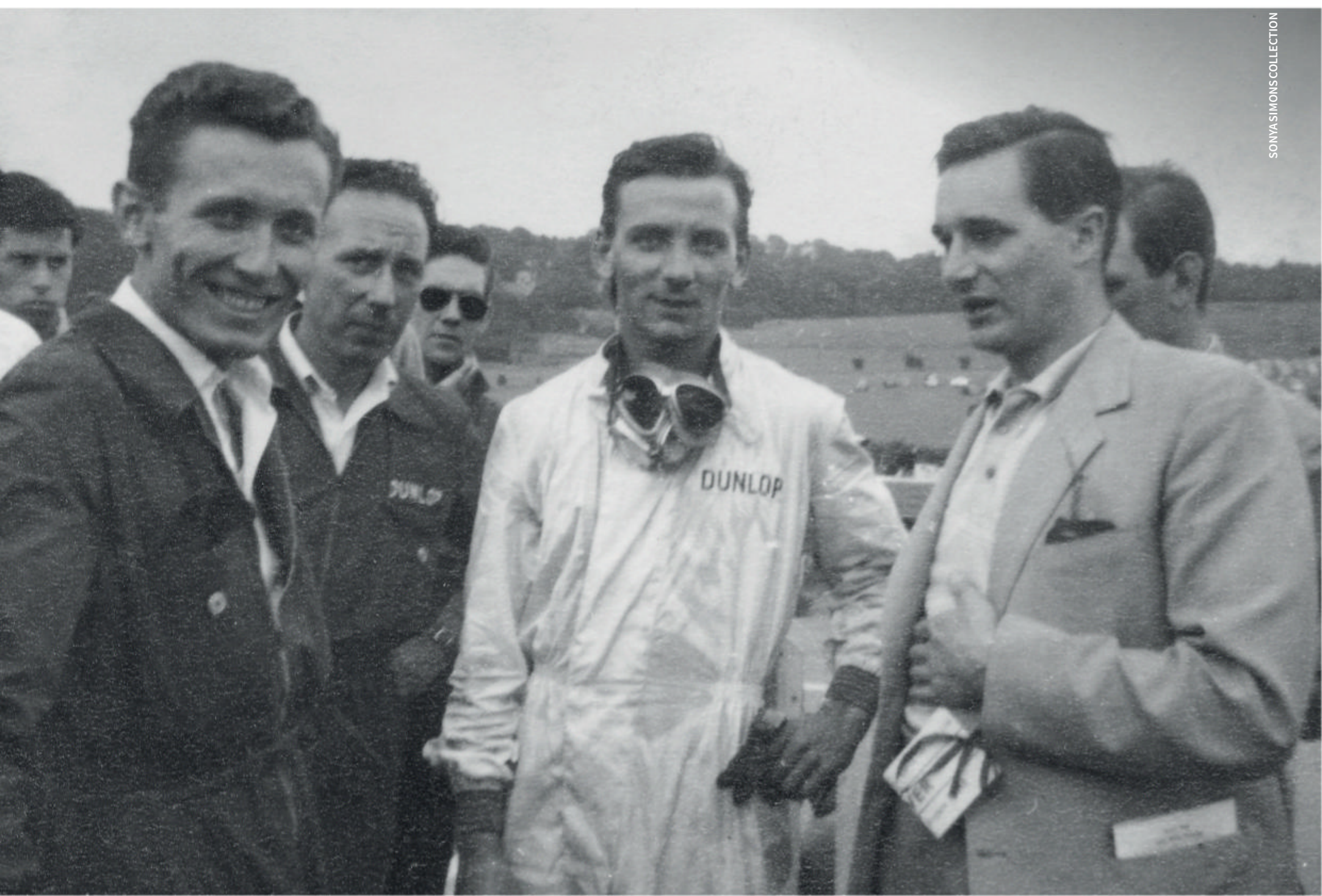
Above right: Bristow on the grid at Brands Hatch, August 1959

Right: at speed at Spa in the 1960 Belgian GP before tragedy struck





MOTORSPORT IMAGES



SONY SIMONS COLLECTION

Left: 10th on his GP debut at Aintree, 1959, driving Cooper-Borgward

Bottom left: with the BRP boys and patron Ken Gregory

Bottom: Collier (left) and Robinson with Bristow prior to 1960 Lavant Cup F2 race at Goodwood, in which he was fourth

Doug Nye, in his book *Cooper Cars*, wrote that Gregory and Alfred Moss then watched Bristow ‘with great interest’ at his third Formula 2 race, the Crystal Palace Whitsun Bank Holiday meeting. He finished sandwiched in third place between the two Yeoman Credit cars of Bueb and Wicken (the BRP team was now being sponsored by said hire purchase company). It was at that meeting that Gregory approached Chris, the result being a track test at Brands Hatch in one of the Cooper-Borgwards. Ken admitted that he was surprised by what he saw. Bristow was almost alarming, so fast did he drive, but he also appeared most capable. The BRP co-founder lost no time in signing him up.

“I had never seen the car he had been driving before,” confessed Gregory. “It was a bitza but he was making it work when it shouldn’t have done. I was unaware of his existence until Tony brought him to my attention.” It is testament to the faith that he had in Robinson, one of the leading mechanics of his generation that, without personally attending the test, he should have signed Bristow on his word. Robinson said that he and Gregory had not discussed the young driver prior to the earlier Brands test day.

Journalists were quickly impressed by the 21-year-old Bristow, who was working for his father in his Streatham garage. “Sooner or later a young Moss or Brooks will appear in the motor racing world,” one newspaper predicted. “I give you [one] worth watching... Chris Bristow. He has been racing a year or two, until now not very well. Suddenly he drives like a veteran, ahead of men like Jack Brabham, the possible 1959 world champion.”

“Bristow was almost alarming, so fast did he drive, but he also appeared most capable”



It has been recorded that he was ‘wild’ and his driving ‘uncontrolled’. *Motor Sport*’s continental correspondent, Denis Jenkinson, wrote as much, leading to an irate letter from a D Ward who felt that ‘Jenks’ was developing an ‘anti-Bristow complex’. Sadly, Bristow had died before this was published. Gregory strenuously refuted any suggestion that Bristow was wild, saying that this was merely the false observation of those who had not heard of him before and could not comprehend that such a talent had, so far, gone unobserved. “All of a sudden this lad comes from nowhere and he is fighting it out with the fast boys.”

“He was naturally quick, not hairy quick,” added Robinson. “He knew what he was doing.” A contemporary report in the magazine did talk of ‘his usual crowd-pleasing slides’.

Chris moved up a league with BRP. Now among the front rank, he was to come under close scrutiny, with it being questioned whether he was very quick or too quick. “Chris wasn’t really a tearaway,” said his sister Sonya, “but he was a very determined person. The fact that we had both had a strange upbringing probably meant that he was determined to make a success of his life and his one sole interest was cars [it has been reported that he was also keen on ice skating]. He did have a side that was closed to most people and he didn’t seem to get into trouble.”

His new boss, Ken Gregory, would wonder if he was, in fact, introverted, perhaps a little secretive: “A serious young man, quiet and unassuming, he kept himself to himself. He was not a partygoer and he certainly did not join in when the likes of Graham Hill and Colin Chapman were dunking bread rolls in wine and throwing them around the Hotel de Paris after the Monaco Grand Prix. Virtually everybody used to go to the Steering Wheel Club but I am certain Chris never did. He let the driving do his talking for him. He was neat, clean and very precise in everything he did, a bit like Tony Brooks who also drove for us.”

Stan Collier looked after Bristow’s Formula 2 car. “He was a natural,” he said. “One of those who come along who you know is going to be good.” His observation that “Chris was great, one of the boys” slightly contradicts Gregory’s assessment of his character. “He was so full of life,” added Robinson. “So cheerful. I never saw him lose his rag.”

Bristow got on well with the whole equipe. He obviously appreciated being asked to drive for what Robinson recalled as “a half decent team” and spent a lot of time at its Lots Road, London workshop “laughing and joking with everybody – always happy, always cheerful”. Collier, who had moved onto BRP’s Formula 1 team by the 1960 Belgian Grand Prix, added: “He was an easy driver to work with. It’s nice working with one who can tell you what he wants.” Sonya pointed out: “We were naturally very proud of him when he signed for Yeoman Credit. All the work and money put into him had proved to be worthwhile.”

The dangers of the Spa-Francorchamps circuit were no more in evidence than during the 1960 Belgian >>

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“Chris had qualified eighth ahead of another comingman, Jim Clark, who was making only his second grand prix start”

Grand Prix weekend. Moss and Mike Taylor had already crashed heavily in practice, both being badly hurt. Brooks had, this time, easily outqualified his young team-mate and occupied the middle of the front row of the grid. Chris had qualified eighth fastest ahead of another comingman, Lotus factory driver Jim Clark, who was making only his second grand prix start.

Gregory walked up to the start with Bristow. Normally he was very eager to get into the car, but on this occasion Ken noted a slight apprehension and pointed out to his young driver that Spa was a hugely dangerous circuit and that he perhaps ought to run a few tenths away from his best until he got settled.

On the strength of Bristow's early lap times, Gregory believes that he took his advice, although he was able to get the better of an early 'ding-dong' with Wolfgang von Trips, the pair playing follow-my-leader behind Brooks. By lap 19 the German's transmission was suffering from vibrations and his position had been taken by his Ferrari team-mate Willy Mairesse. The Belgian, in his first grand prix and known for his intensity, had caught up with Chris and had engaged him in an all-out duel.

When they started the lap the Cooper was fractionally ahead. As the pair rushed down to Eau Rouge they were within inches of each other, Chris still leading as they rushed up the hill and into the woods. Neither Gregory nor Robinson heard of anyone who saw what happened next although *Motor Sport's* report says Bristow was on the wrong line as he approached the fast Burnenville corner and was trying to get back on the inside of the road. After losing control of his Cooper on that long right-hander, he flew off the circuit and was decapitated

by a low wire fence.

The following day Robinson went to Chris's room at the Hotel Portugal to find that Gregory, with heavy heart, had already tidied it up. He collected the luggage and also his Jaguar and drove it back to Streatham. There he met Chris's father, but there was little that he could say. Gregory remembers the Samengo-Turner brothers, who owned Yeoman Credit, being in tears when he told them. Collier observed: "This was the worst one. Tony [Robinson] was very friendly with Chris and was very upset when he was killed. These things did affect him. It was the same when Harry Schell was killed. We had a bad year that year."

In June 1961, a year after the fatal accident, Chris's father opened a petrol station on the Streatham High Road known as the Chris Bristow Service Station. The following year, he presented the British Racing Drivers' Club with a memorial trophy named after his son. With his approval the BRDC decided to present this annually to the driver achieving the fastest lap on the short Silverstone Club Circuit. A second Chris Bristow Trophy was added in 1965 for the most promising driver to have raced on the Club Circuit. This was last awarded in 2002 but, in keeping with its ethos, the original is now given to the winner of the Silverstone Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year Award, past recipients including George Russell and Lando Norris.

There is a tendency to simply link Chris Bristow with what was one of the darkest days in British motorsport. To do so is to ignore his natural talent and unfulfilled potential. "They don't come along too often like that," said Collier.

"Chris Bristow would probably have become world champion," observed Gregory, reminiscing in his Spanish villa towards the end of his life. He then stopped before carefully reconsidering his verdict and correcting himself. "Chris *would* have been world champion.

"He was just extraordinarily fast." ❄



Bristow is one of six drivers featured in Forever Young. The others are Stuart Lewis-Evans, Chris Lambert, Bert Hawthorne, Bertrand Fabi and Paul Warwick. The book is available from bhp-publishing.co.uk, priced £40 + P&P



Maurice Hamilton's

ALTERNATIVE VIEW

Lewis Hamilton has a lot to prove as he settles in at Ferrari, although he does have form for confounding critics after rolling the dice on an eyebrow-raising team swap

I feel for Sir Lewis Hamilton. As someone who has passed 40 – to put it generously – I have every sympathy as my namesake goes into the 2025 season with constant taunts that he's over the hill, with plenty to prove.

Look, it's only a number. OK, 40 may be more than twice the age of Andrea Kimi Antonelli, Hamilton's replacement at Mercedes. So what? If you're talking numbers, how about 104 pole positions, 105 wins and seven world championships? You don't reach those peaks without learning a lesson or two about staying on or near the top without either falling off the edge or sliding sadly down the other side. Every emotional aspect of his performance in the wet at Silverstone last year proved that.

Hamilton won two races (grands prix, not silly sprints) in 2024, which was fewer than 2012, the year he appeared to be even more ill-advised when deciding to join Mercedes. Lewis was leaving the comfort blanket of McLaren for a relatively new team that had scratched a single victory in 2012. Despite

the promotional 'Return of the Silver Arrows' puffery, Mercedes never looked likely to match its mighty mid-1950s phase.

Hamilton was making the move largely on the advice of Niki Lauda, a man familiar with tricky decisions. It was Lauda who had defied the presumed odds by returning from retirement in 1982. The young bloods on the grid – Didier Pironi, Alain Prost, Nelson Piquet – may have been only a couple of years younger than Niki, but that did not devalue a typically crafty win three races into an extraordinary comeback.

I imagine Lewis would be well-pleased if he could pull off a win this year at round three at Suzuka. Or preferably before. There has, after all, been an exceptional precedent. Nigel Mansell moved from Williams to Ferrari in 1989 – and won the first race. With the greatest respect to Our Nige, this remains one of those 'How the fu... flippin' heck did he manage that?' mysteries thrown up from time to time.

Don't just take my word for it. Nigel was so pessimistic about finishing, never mind winning, that he changed his

booking to an earlier flight out of Rio de Janeiro on race day. The Ferrari 640, with its semi-automatic paddleshift gearbox, had caused numerous problems from the outset, culminating in Mansell being able to complete no more than five consecutive laps at any stage during practice in Brazil. As far as Nigel was concerned, the 640 was lacking more than a clutch pedal. And yet, not only did the car run sweetly when it mattered on a hot Sunday afternoon, but Mansell also survived the steering wheel coming off in his hands. Feelings that this race was never really meant to belong to Mansell were heightened when the trophy, while being held aloft, actually managed to cut his fingers and draw blood. You couldn't make it up.

Mansell is among the 11 Brits prior to Hamilton to have raced for Ferrari in F1. It came close to being 12 when Jackie Stewart shook hands with Enzo Ferrari on a deal for 1968. Jackie had won two grands prix with BRM and was considered a bright prospect. But not bright enough for the 'Old Man'. Mr Ferrari – as was his wont – played one driver off against another by holding discussions with Jacky Ickx (also super-quick, but yet to win a grand prix). Stewart was unimpressed when he found out about this, his mood not helped when the surprising news came during a passing conversation with Ickx,



No one more surprised than Mansell himself at first-time-out Ferrari win, though trophy-related injury meant agony with the ecstasy

MOTORSPORT IMAGES

“Timing – as Fernando Alonso probably wouldn't want to tell you – is everything”



Stewart had the last laugh choosing Tyrrell over '68 Ferrari drive that instead went to Ickx

MOTORSPORT IMAGES

who seemed to believe the drive was his. Stewart more or less ensured the seat would belong to the Belgian by immediately breaking all contact with Ferrari and turning to Ken Tyrrell.

Had social media existed at the time, Instagram, X and the rest would have been frothing with scornful comments about Stewart's judgement and his apparent wish to be a permanent also-ran. He was dismissing the magic of Maranello for an outfit run from a woodyard in Surrey. Tyrrell didn't even have a grand prix team at that stage. But Ken, in Stewart's view, possessed integrity. He also had the prospect of a Matra chassis with a Ford Cosworth DFV in the back. Everyone could see that the V8, unveiled in June 1967, would be the powerplant of choice. But little was known about a chassis produced by a French aerospace company with a CEO whose first love was race horses.

To be fair, Stewart also had his doubts. But a couple of laps of Goodwood in a Matra F2 car instantly and massively raised his perception of how a single-seater should handle. The rigid chassis (achieved by doing away with bag tanks in the sides and having the fuel contained in resin-lined box sections) was to be incorporated in the F1 car. Stewart went on to win three grands prix in 1968 and was in the running for the championship at the end of it. In 1969, he cleaned up with the Matra MS80, considered by Sir Jackie to be the best race car he has ever driven. Meanwhile, Ickx had won just one grand prix in 1968 and left Ferrari soon after. Timing – as Fernando Alonso probably wouldn't want to tell you – is everything.

Who's to say that Ferrari and its 41-year-old driver will not have a handle on the revised formula for 2026? Age will be the least important number if Hamilton manages to take an eighth championship and achieve his cherished, if largely unspoken, ambition. Anyway, if he thinks reaching 40 brings unnecessary grief, wait until he hits 70. That's when you've been there and done it, but can't remember what it was. 🍀



T V C O M M E N T A T O R

DAVID CROFT

Ever wondered what a TV commentator does during a race weekend when he's not talking from the commentary box? Sky Sports' David Croft kept a diary throughout the final round of last year's championship in Abu Dhabi for Autosport

OLEG KARPOV

PHOTOGRAPHY GLENN DUNBAR/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

THURSDAY

I pulled back the curtains at seven o'clock in the morning and thought, 'Blimey, that's a bit bright!' We're at the end of the season and it's the sixth race in eight weeks, so everyone's a bit tired. I had some catching up to do as I was a bit behind on my commentary notes. So I spent the next four hours writing them in my hotel room. It's always a double-sided A4 sheet, divided into boxes for teams, drivers, general stats and tyre information. It's my comfort blanket for the entire weekend.

At around 11am I paused and left for the track. As we stayed close to the circuit, I could walk in and out, which I really like. I put my AirPods in and listened to *Live Drugs Again* by The War on Drugs, my current favourite album. About 20 minutes later I got to the track, sat down in the office, took out my notes again and continued writing.

Then we had our production meeting, where we went through the stories that were coming in and discussed the features that we were going to do, so everyone was on the same page. I had an interview with Kevin Magnussen scheduled for Friday, so I had to prepare some questions for that.

From there I went to the press conference – but arrived late because I had a great catch-up



Shooting the breeze
with drivers builds trust

in the paddock with Andy Cowell, who I hadn't seen for a while. We talked about all things Aston Martin and it was a very interesting and useful conversation! Thankfully, our news reporter Craig Slater was at the press conference to cover the first part. When I arrived for the second one, I decided to wait – and then Max Verstappen turned up outside. So I spent 10 minutes talking to Max about Qatar and his drive before Nico Hulkenberg and Franco Colapinto joined. It turned out to be a great chat.

As I'm not a driver – I've done three laps in an F1 car, but that's it – it's nice to get a sense of what it's like from those who do it every week. I also use these moments to build relationships and trust. And Franco, for example, I didn't know that well before.

Then, during the press conference, I asked Max about Qatar and the penalty he got after qualifying. I didn't know that George Russell was talking about Max at the same time. Otherwise I would have phrased the question differently, but I still got a good answer.

And then I spent the rest of the day catching up with people in the paddock, talking to engineers, mechanics, drivers – trying to get as much insight as possible, but also building relationships.



Verstappen quizzed about Qatar penalty



SkyPad time with Davidson – just don't mention Le Mans



FRIDAY

Like any other morning, the day at the track started with the production meeting and then it's almost straight into FP1. I get to the commentary booth about 45 minutes before the session starts. I put my charts on the wall, I've got my notes that I finished last night, I've got my laptop set up, notepad, I've got my water bottles.

And then Anthony Davidson came up. We had a quick chat about the reserve drivers who would be taking part in the session – and, of course, we mentioned Ryo Hirakawa, who was about to drive one of the McLarens. "The Le Mans winner," Ant said. And I immediately asked, "Oh, are we allowed to talk about that now?" because that's a running gag in our team. Ant famously came within three minutes of winning Le Mans [in 2016], so

now, whenever that race is mentioned, we always start talking about how much of a driver's dream it must be to win Le Mans, until Ant says, "Too soon, guys, too soon". We've been doing that for many years now but it's still "too soon"! It's a privilege to work with friends you can always laugh with. I hope that comes across on air.

Craig Slater joined us for FP1 and we had a bit of a laugh about that, too. We had Zak Brown join us from the pitlane and it was a nice interaction because he knows Craig doesn't do commentary normally. So we had a bit of banter about him being our Hirakawa.

Nothing is scripted, of course, but I have an idea of the topics I want to cover in the back of my mind, and I have some statistics to enhance a discussion. Why is Sergio Perez's future at Red Bull under threat? Well, because he's scored so many points in so many races and hasn't >>

finished in the top six since Zandvoort – and that’s what I need my notes for.

Then there was FP2 and we finished the day doing the SkyPad piece with Ant and recording the interview with Magnussen. I managed to make a very obscure ice hockey reference: I said he was the Marty McSorley of Haas. Well, if you don’t know what that means, basically Wayne Gretzky was the special one who got all the glory, and McSorley was the enforcer who made sure people stayed out of his way – and given Kevin’s stout defensive drives this year, I thought it wasn’t a bad one to throw at him. Kevin got it!

SATURDAY

At the last race of the season, lots of people turn up that you haven’t seen for ages, so I spent the whole morning in the paddock catching up with everyone. Then we had Nico Rosberg in the booth for FP3. That’s always fun because you never know what he’s going to say next but it’s always worth listening to.

Then a quick visit to the paddock again – and I was back in the office, working on my qualifying notes, basically to have something in front of me so that when it all happens at the end, I’ll have a very easy reference point to put things in context. This time, for example, I needed ‘Lando’s eighth pole of the season’. These are very simple notes, but I always write things down by hand – it’s easier to remember.

Martin Brundle was with us for qualifying; that’s the first time we’ve worked together this weekend. He usually goes trackside on Fridays. But we have such a good relationship that it’s always seamless. We’ve got a journalist and F1 expert, Mark Hughes, with us, who’s just there to help us spot things: who’s using old tyres, who’s using new ones, etc. There are a lot of things to process in qualifying, it’s all about numbers and information. So he gives us hints in the form of Post-it notes.

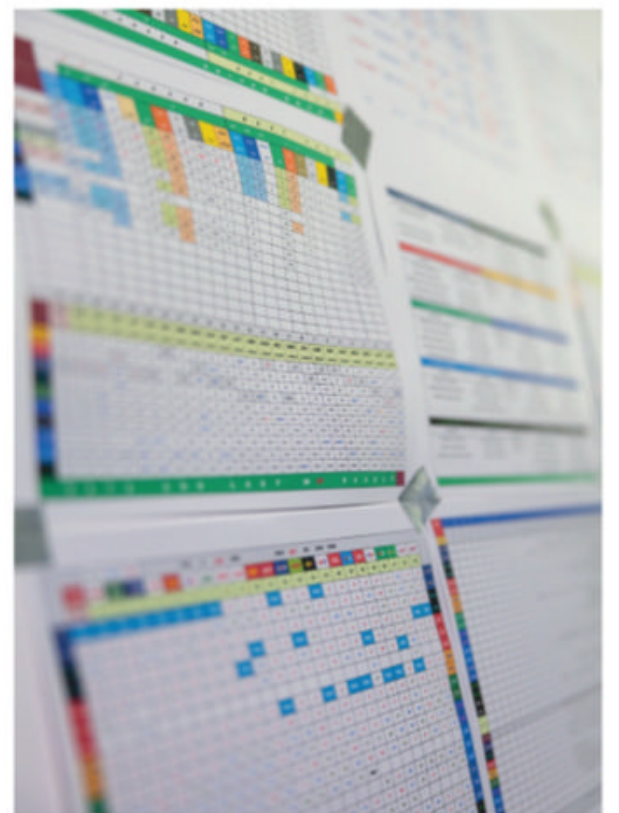
Lewis Hamilton went out after Q1 and that’s a perfect example of where I need my notes. I knew that meant Lewis was going to start P16 at best and, as I’ve got all his qualifying performances at this track written

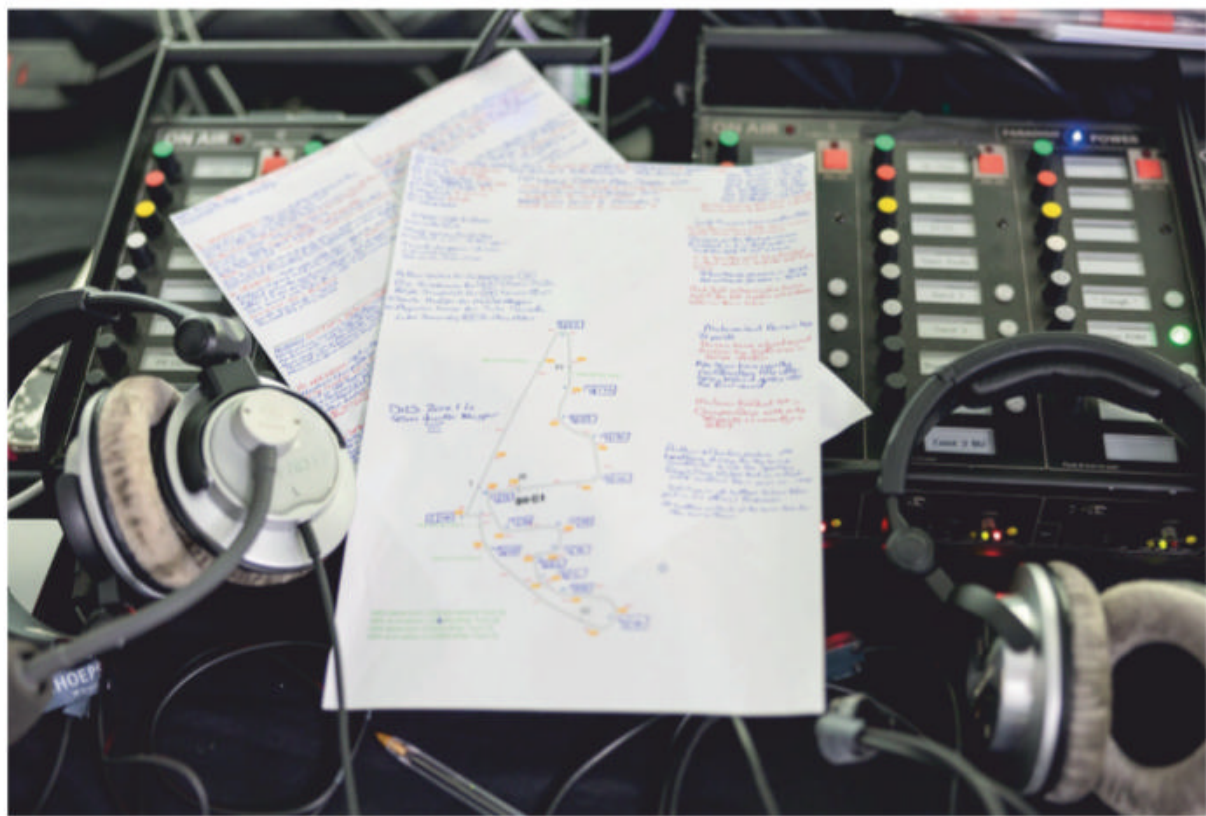


down, I could say, “He’s going to get his worst ever grid position in Abu Dhabi”. And that’s pretty instant! I’ve learned to elongate a sentence when I’m just looking down to find something out.

In the evening I went with a friend to a sort of Ferrari owners’ gathering not too far from the track and bumped into Fred Vasseur. Again, we had a very good 15-minute chat about Ferrari, his philosophy and what he’s trying to achieve, how he’s trying to give people the confidence to take risks. So

“I had no idea what I was going to say when I opened my mouth and I came up with, ‘Right, let’s Abu Dhabi do this’. None of it’s scripted”





you're never off duty – because, again, it's something I can use in my commentary, even though I wasn't looking for a story.

SUNDAY

I sprang out of bed like a gazelle because it was the last day of the season. Went to the track. Had a production meeting where we went through the show: what we were going to do before, during and after. And then we had a big team photo, which we usually do at the last race of the season.

Then we went straight into the briefings. We're in a privileged position and the teams are trying to help us with Martin to be as prepared as possible. So Ferrari made Diego Ioverno available to us to go through the strategy options and ask questions. He said it was an easy one-stop race but warned that some people might stop early to make it a two-stop for everyone. Then we had a chat with Andrea Stella at McLaren, which was also fascinating because we could sort of get a sense of how he was feeling. And then there was a media briefing with Tom McCullough from Aston Martin.

Again, every Sunday morning I try to meet people in the paddock, have as many conversations as possible and, when I bump into Martin, we exchange information. You are only as good as the weakest member of your team. Martin and I never want to be the weakest member – and we want the other to be the strongest member as well. It's very much a partnership.

About an hour and a half before the race, I go to the commentary box. I write my grid by hand because that's how you remember where people are. Then I watch Martin's grid walk and somehow get myself in the right frame of mind so that when the light goes red I can start talking and I am raring to go.

Again, I had no idea what I was going to say when I opened my mouth and I came up with "Right, let's Abu Dhabi do this" to start it off with a bit of a pun, and then just rattle through the first three minutes where I'm talking about the maps and the grid. None of it's scripted and it gets my adrenalin going.

Of course I go back to my notes if I need to. By the end of the weekend I'm usually using about 50% of what I've written down. And then, before you know it, the race is over – and it's like, 'Right, let's go to the next one!'

Only this time there's 98 days in between. 🍷



WILL OSCAR PIASTRI BE LANDO NORRIS'S BIGGEST PROBLEM IN 2025?

*The expectation is that McLaren will be on the pace again, so the intra-team fight **could** become the story of the season*

PHOTOGRAPHY **MOTORSPORT IMAGES**



**NO, IT WILL BE
LANDO NORRIS...**
BEN HUNT

The Norris/Piastri relationship was one of the many intriguing factors that McLaren was required to manage last season and it did so with varying success. The somewhat embarrassing pleas for Norris to surrender the lead of the Hungarian Grand Prix were a flash point, so too the faintest coming together in the Italian GP. But on both occasions the situation was managed enough to get the desired outcome – the constructors' championship title. There was also the time when Norris defied his team's orders and handed Piastri victory in the Qatar GP sprint race. It was all fairly amicable.

Norris finished the season adamant that 2025 was "going to be his

year" and indeed he might be right. But the biggest threat to his title challenge will not come from his McLaren team-mate, but from himself.

Norris has been widely accused of failing to perform under pressure, with those pointing out that he has an unwelcome ability not to capitalise when starting on pole. This is an opinion Norris rejects, and in turn he can point out how he delivered in the most pressurised of situations in Abu Dhabi last year to win the race and clinch McLaren's constructors' crown.

The biggest challenge therefore is not Piastri or indeed the pressure, but his mentality when he goes up against Max Verstappen. We saw in 2024 in Austria how the two collided and Norris was angry afterwards. But that mood quickly dissipated and he patched things up with Verstappen. Had he harnessed that fire he could have perhaps used it to his benefit. Norris says he knows he needs a change in mentality if he is to win the title. No more Mr Nice Guy, he simply has to be more ruthless. The problem is, I don't know if that streak is within his nature.



YES, ALONG WITH HIS MANAGEMENT STUART CODLING

That Oscar is a cool customer is in no doubt. If he were any more laid back he wouldn't be able to see over the top of his steering wheel.

The likelihood of him throwing tantrums over unequal treatment, or having to give way to his team-mate, is low. Ditto the probability of him getting involved in political games. He also has the presence of mind to assume nothing, and to prepare himself for the coming season in the best way possible: that is, to ally his great speed to better tyre management and more consistency in qualifying.

The problem will come if he establishes an early lead over his team-mate, at which point 'papaya rules' will quickly become moot if McLaren wants to claim both world championships. The lessons are clear from Williams in 1986, or indeed McLaren in 2007. If you don't pick a point where one team-mate gets priority, the danger is they take points off each other and someone else sweeps in to snatch the prize.

Should Norris open a points lead, even if Piastri's inclination is to play nice, his management will be urging him not to. As a driver, Mark Webber chafed against being cast as Sebastian Vettel's supporting act at Red Bull. As Piastri's Mr 10 Percent he'll be equally driven to block such a scenario. The danger for McLaren is there are plenty of other teams who would willingly put in an offer, and Webber has shown through his extraction of Piastri from Alpine that he's prepared to move fast and break things.



YES, BECAUSE PIASTRI IS STILL GETTING BETTER JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

My colleagues will likely have pointed to the areas where Piastri still lags in comparison to Norris, but what we need to look at is his rate of improvement versus Norris to gauge how much of a threat he'll be. The usual bugbears attributed to Piastri are qualifying pace and tyre management, but these are both areas in which he showed tremendous growth from 2023 to 2024.

For pace differentials, let's look at supertimes: a driver's fastest time in relation to the best lap of a race weekend. This gives a picture of how frequently a driver can extract the full potential from a car, serving as a metric for their outright pace. The simplified figures are thus: Piastri was 0.227% slower on average versus Norris in 2023, and 0.159% slower in 2024. But this followed a trend of improvement over the 2024 season, where his percentage gap to Norris was 0.196% in the opening half of the year and 0.121% in the second half.

And tyre management? This is a bit harder to measure, but you can take the liberty of explaining that away with the idea that this skill improves with experience. Piastri is much more adept at coaxing his Pirellis through longer stints than his efforts in his rookie season, and a winter to evaluate that progress should mean he can maintain an extra couple of tenths per lap over a race distance. Assuming McLaren's next car is another winner, he should make life very difficult for Norris.



NO, YOU CAN'T FORGET THE REST ALEX KALINAUCKAS

Sorry to live so relentlessly in the real world but, at this stage of the 2025 F1 campaign, there's not enough evidence to suggest that just beating his excellent team-mate

is Norris's only hurdle to claiming a first drivers' title. A multi-team scrap is not only predicted, but it could also well be a four-way battle for the first time in this generation.

OK, let's first assume McLaren heads the pack and Norris and Piastri lock out the Albert Park front row. Whether he's starting ahead or behind, Piastri's ice-cool killer instinct will kick in – a potential first home hero Australian GP win since it joined the F1 calendar at stake in this scenario.

And, if an intra-team title tussle does come to pass, you can bet that Piastri will be out to 'Monza' Norris every chance he gets. Why would he not, when he did it even with the faintest of 2024 championship hopes?

I'm told that McLaren is already telling its staff not to view doing the double as holding any extra significance in 2025 to what it achieved with the constructors' last year. It doesn't want extra distractions. But Piastri has form in going against the grain, sending a warning in meeting Max Verstappen's fire with his own determined flame in that Abu Dhabi crash, when McLaren was still yet to seal its first teams' prize in 26 years.

But this all ignores the chances of Verstappen, Lewis Hamilton, Charles Leclerc and the Mercedes duo. Even if Norris is taking care of Piastri, the rest still must be dealt with too. Combined, they are an even bigger threat to Norris's attempt to join the legends.



YouTube

To watch a video of
this debate go to
[youtube.com/
@AutosportOfficial](https://youtube.com/@AutosportOfficial)





MALCOLM GRIFFITHS

♥️🚩
**AYAO
KOMATSU**

*The Haas F1 team boss on his love
for the Lotus Exige and desire
to see K2 with his own eyes*

OLEG KARPOV

MECHANIC FOR MY KIDS

Before I had kids, I wasn't really a 'kids' person, but now spending time with them brings me so much joy. I love doing things with them away from home, and recently they started doing go-karts for fun – and only for fun! Every now and again, I'll be mechanicing for them, helping them get their karts on the track. It's great seeing them come back with a smile.



O'DONNELL/SHUTTERSTOCK

MARTIAL ARTS

I didn't do martial arts as a kid, but I've started practising a bit with my kids. I've done a bit of Taekwondo and I'd like to train properly in Muay Thai, but I just don't have the time. I do it now and again, but I don't spar in Muay Thai yet. I do spar in Taekwondo, and it's amazing how strategic it is, it keeps you thinking all the time – and I love that side of it the most.



GOLD AND GOOSE/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

MOTORBIKES

Motorbikes have been one of my earliest passions. When I was younger, I rode a Kawasaki Z400 FX and loved it. But at some point, I decided that if I wanted to live, I shouldn't ride motorbikes until I'm at least 50 because I've had so many crashes. It's unbelievable that I never broke anything!

EXPERIENCING DIFFERENT CULTURES

One of the reasons I wanted to work in F1 was because it's so international. I've always loved the idea of travelling around the world, meeting people from different cultures, and experiencing new things. Of course, with this job, there's not much time to explore while travelling, but I always try to taste the local cuisine and embrace the culture wherever I go.



SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

NORTHAMPTON SAINTS

I played rugby when I was at university. Not that I was any good, but I always loved it. Our first team centre was a guy called Jonny Bell who played for Northampton Saints. He was the reason I started supporting Saints 30 years ago and I have been supporting them ever since.

I used to go to a lot of their games and the atmosphere at their ground is amazing. More recently, I've even met some of the lads who played for Saints when they won the championship about 10 years ago: ex-captain Dylan Hartley (above), for example, who then introduced me to Eddie Jones, who coached not only England but also Japan. He's a really interesting guy! Rugby has always been big for me and it also helped me integrate into the local society when I moved to the UK.



SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

ROCK CLIMBING

I like to be in nature; it gives me a feeling of reset. Rock climbing is one of my biggest hobbies. Of course, with the job I do, I can't be climbing all the time. But I do quite a bit of indoor bouldering, even when I'm travelling. All you need are climbing shoes and a chalk bag. Almost everywhere we go with F1, I know which indoor climbing gym I can visit.



MALCOLM GRIFFITHS

K2

Before I die, I need to see K2. I'm not claiming I can climb K2 – with my skill set, I'd probably die if I tried. The summit would be suicidal, as it's insanely difficult, but I want to at least see it from base camp. As a kid, I worked in a mountain hut during summers, just looking after it. For me, it's almost like a religious experience when



HAWK16/SHUTTERSTOCK

the morning mist clears, and you see the mountain in front of you. You can't describe the feeling; it's amazing. It makes you feel very small. K2 is the mountain I adore.

COVENTRY CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

I used to live in Coventry, and everyone around me supported Coventry City Football Club, so I started supporting them too! I'm pretty sure I was the only Japanese person supporting the club for a long time. But last year, we had our first Japanese player ever in the history of City, Tatsuhiro Sakamoto, and that's changed. When I was in Tokyo last year before the Japanese Grand Prix, I even saw a random Japanese guy wearing a sky-blue Coventry City top!

MUSIC

My father was a musicologist and even wrote a book about Beethoven. I grew up surrounded by classical music and played the piano until I was about 12. Then, during my rebellious streak, I decided I'd had enough and went in the complete opposite direction. I discovered the Sex Pistols and fell in love with their music. Although 99% of people might disagree with me, I think the Pistols and Beethoven have something in common. Beethoven's music was rebellious and powerful, and the Pistols were controversial and groundbreaking too!



SUTTON/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

LOTUS EXIGE

I've had a Lotus Exige for... I don't even know how long. At least 15 years! I love the car. It's such a nice, nimble little car. It feels incredibly direct when you drive it, and it always puts a smile on my face.



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Big prize for Fairclough

Deagen Fairclough was crowned as the 2024 Silverstone Autosport BRDC Young Driver of the Year at the Autosport Awards in January. The British Formula 4 champion beat Arvid Lindblad, Louis Sharp and Freddie Slater to the accolade, which aims to find and support up-and-coming British single-seater talent. The 18-year-old was presented the Award by inaugural winner David Coulthard, chairman of the judges Derek Warwick, British Racing Drivers' Club chairman Peter Digby, Silverstone CEO Stuart Pringle and Autosport Chief Editor Kevin Turner. As well as the £200,000 prize, Fairclough will also receive an F1 test drive with Aston Martin, full membership of the BRDC, Arai helmet and Jordan Bespoke helmet bag.

Photographer Glenn Dunbar/
Motorsport Images

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THANK YOU

Silverstone, Autosport and the BRDC gratefully acknowledge the support of Arai, Aramco Formula One Team, Beechdean Motorsport, Grand Prix Racewear, Jordan Bespoke, Mercedes Sims, MotorSport Vision, Pirelli, Porsche Human Performance, RLRM Sport and TSL



FORMULA REGIONAL/F4

NO MORE MYGALES AS LIGIER ABSORBS CONSTRUCTOR

There will be no more racing cars built under the Mygale name, with Ligier Automotive becoming a majority shareholder in its fellow French constructor.

Ligier had already been a minority shareholder in Mygale since 2013. Since then, Mygale went toe to toe with Tatuus in the global market for FIA Formula 4, and supplied cars for series that included the British, which kicked off in 2015. Ligier continued to focus on sportscars, although moved into the US single-seater scene in F4 and Formula Regional when it took over American constructor Crawford.

Mygale’s star waned in F4, with the British championship – its flagship series – switching to Tatuus in 2022. This has left Mygale supplying cars only for the centrally run French series, as well as the new similarly operated

Indian championship and the Chinese, which has grown significantly in recent years.

Bertrand Decoster, who founded Mygale to compete in French Formula Ford in 1989, stays on with Ligier as managing director. “This step ensures the continuity of 35 years of development and success in formula racing,” he said. “Beyond that, joining forces with Ligier Automotive allows us to grow into a company of over 130 motorsport specialists, enabling us to target all formula racing markets.”

The new tie-up begins with Ligier’s plan to build a new Formula Regional car, the JSF326, in an attempt to break into a market also dominated by Tatuus.

Since its early days in FFord, Mygale – so named because a friend of Decoster’s observed that his Jean-Claude Silani-penned racers resembled a species of spider of that name – moved successfully into Formula Renault when the 2.0-litre regulations were introduced in 1995. It then won the contract to produce spec cars for Formula BMW from 2002, and enjoyed a stint in Formula 3, claiming victory in the Italian series in 2012 with Riccardo Agostini.

MARCUS SIMMONS



Lando Norris was first Mygale-mounted British F4 champ

FORMULA E

PIT BOOST GETS GREEN LIGHT FOR JEDDAH

The Pit Boost concept, which requires drivers to make a mandatory pitstop, will make its long-awaited Formula E debut at the Jeddah E-Prix on 14-15 February.

The concept has been in development for over two years, and means that the new Gen3 Evo cars will receive a 10% battery recharge at 600kW via a plug-in charger that will take approximately 30 seconds, during a prescribed pitstop window.

The idea is to mix up races on double-header weekends, with Jeddah the first such event of the 2024-25 season. Pit Boost will also therefore be in use in Monaco, Tokyo, Shanghai, Berlin and London.

“What we thought for Season 11 is that basically let’s launch this new system in places where we can do a complete different race the day after,” said championship co-founder Alberto Longo.

“I think that was a very good solution on our side because we didn’t want to implement it on every single race in Season 11, but obviously if it works, most likely we will do it next season as well. This is not

confirmed yet, but definitely we will look into how good and how exciting the system is, and if it works like the way we have simulated.”

Pit Boost was initially touted for the beginning of the Gen3 era in 2023, but reliability and safety concerns meant it has taken until now for the FIA and FE organisers to be satisfied that it can be used during competition.

The concept was tested for the first time during a race at pre-season testing at Jarama last November, with the data from that simulation analysed by the championship and governing body. While the concept has been part of the regulations for some time, an alteration was made in December following a meeting of the FIA’s World Motor Sport Council, whereby it will act independently of Attack Mode.

FIA FE head Pablo Martino added: “Every single team has been allocated one of the spare boosters. However, in the pitlane, there will be two additional boosters that will be to use in case of a failure of a team’s original booster.”

STEFAN MACKLEY





BIG CROP FOR NXT GENERATION

While the IndyCar Series enjoys plenty of intrigue as the opening round looms at St Petersburg on the first weekend of March (see p80), the second-tier Indy NXT is also enjoying a surge, with over 20 cars expected on the Florida streets. New recruits from the

European scene include 2021 FIA Formula 3 champion and five-time F2 race winner Dennis Hauger, the Norwegian lining up with Andretti Global, plus German Sophia Florsch and Australian Tommy Smith, who are among an eight-strong HMD Motorsports squad that includes fellow F3 graduate Caio Collet, third in his rookie season of NXT in 2024.

Also on the grid at St Pete with HMD will be GB3 racer Nikita Johnson, who is contesting selected rounds in a car-share deal with reigning USF Juniors champ Max Taylor. Another GB3 racer, Scot Seb Murray, has joined Andretti Cape, with Irish duo James Roe (Andretti) and Jonathan Browne (Chip Ganassi Racing) staying on for another year.



THREE-CYLINDER POWER IN OLD F3

The Dallara 324 car built to the old philosophy of Formula 3 is being introduced this season to Euroformula Open, but the significant thing is that it is powered by a three-cylinder turbocharged engine. The 1.6-litre TOM'S GTE33,

based on the G16E-GTS from the Toyota GR Yaris road car, has emerged from a successful first season of use in Japan's Super Formula Lights series in the 324, and now replaces the Spiess and HWA powerplants in use in European F3 from 2014-18, and in EFO since 2019. While power has been hiked from 220 to 275bhp, and torque

is also increased, Dallara has managed to install the engines with only an incremental weight increase. "The future of the traditional F3 car was uncertain," said Dallara project leader Jos Claes. "We are making this car, which is a car that deserves it, get a second life." **MARCUS SIMMONS**



RACE WINNERS 18 January-2 February

FORMULA REGIONAL MIDDLE EAST

Yas Marina 18-19 January

- Races 1 & 3** Freddie Slater (above) (Mumbai Falcons)
Race 2 Kanato Le (ART Grand Prix)

Yas Marina 22-23 January

- Races 1 & 3** Evan Giltair (ART Grand Prix)
Race 2 Brando Badoer (PHM Racing)

POINTS 1 Giltair 110; 2 Slater 98; 3 Badoer 92.

FORMULA REGIONAL OCEANIA

Hampton Downs 18-19 January

- Races 1 & 3** Arvid Lindblad (M2 Competition)
Race 2 Sebastian Manson (M2 Competition)

Manfeild 25-26 January

- Races 1 & 3** Arvid Lindblad (M2 Competition)
Race 2 Zack Scoular (MTEC Motorsport)

Teretonga 1-2 February

- Race 1** Matias Zagazata (M2 Competition)
Race 2 Manson
Race 3 Lindblad (below)

POINTS 1 Lindblad 312; 2 Nikita Johnson 253; 3 Scoular 247.



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INSIDER

International appeal abounds in Super Formula, says Jamie Klein

After a 2024 season devoid of foreign interest, apart from Theo Pourchaire's disastrous cameo in the opening round and outings for Ben Barnicoat and Nyck de Vries as his Team Impul replacements, international drivers are well and truly back in vogue in Super Formula this year. There were set to be no fewer than four *gaijins* on the grid for the season-opening double-header at Suzuka in early March. Their backgrounds are varied too, ranging from a recent Formula 1 academy prospect to a driver better known for piloting a Hypercar than a single-seater. Here's what you need to know about them...

A return to Toyota's embrace

Super Formula fans are already well acquainted with Sacha Fenestraz, the 2022 runner-up who returns to Japan after spending two seasons racing in Formula E with Nissan. After losing his drive in the all-electric series relatively late, Fenestraz was courted by his old employer Toyota, which fought off competition from Nissan's Japanese arm to lure him back into the fold for a double Super Formula/Super GT programme. In the single-seater series, there's the added carrot of being able to race for Toyota flagship team TOM'S, where he partners reigning champion Sho Tsuboi.

"It's a process of rebuilding confidence, especially in the high-speed corners, and I don't want to overdo it and make mistakes," says Fenestraz, who will race under an Argentinian licence for the first time this year. "The car is also different to how it was three years ago. There's no hurry to be at the level I was at before straight away. It'll take a bit of time to rebuild, and I want to do it the right way, not making mistakes."

F1 ladder reject searches for redemption

Meanwhile, Zak O'Sullivan joins forces with Fenestraz's old team Kondo Racing after making his first outing with the Toyota-powered squad last December in the Suzuka test. The 20-year-old Briton, who won the Aston Martin Autosport

BRDC Award in 2021, is hoping to put a troubled Formula 2 campaign cut short by funding woes behind him as he embarks on his first season outside of the embrace of the Williams F1 Academy.

"They're very different cars, quicker than F2, which I'm looking forward to, and in general it's a very competitive championship," says O'Sullivan. "That's the big appeal. The car is very intuitive to drive. There's a lot more downforce than what I was used to in F2 and the performance level is a lot closer to F1. Power steering as well is a nice addition!"

O'Sullivan went into pre-season testing in February with only one day of running under his belt, the least of all the newcomers. At Kondo, he goes up against Kenta Yamashita, a mainstay of the Toyota Super Formula stable who can be seriously quick at times. "It's a big challenge for me and something different, so I'm not really sure how I'm going to do," O'Sullivan adds. "But that's part of the fun of it."

WEC convert going all in on Japan

For single-seater racing aficionados, Oliver Rasmussen is likely to be the least familiar name of this quartet. The Dane's last season on the European ladder was back in 2021 in FIA F3. After a point-less season for HWA, he switched focus to sportscars, joining Jota Sport's LMP2 line-up in the World Endurance Championship. He graduated to the top Hypercar class last year, driving a Hertz-liveried customer Porsche 963 for the British squad.

Having left Jota amid its switch to Cadillac, Rasmussen is focusing fully on Japan in 2025: he'll also race in Super GT's lower GT300 class in apr's Lexus LC500h alongside his Super Formula commitments for Team Impul. "The car is much quicker than anything I've driven before, but the team has been really helpful, and I think the work I did so far convinced them I can be good," he notes. "Hopefully it's a good sign!"

Gamer/racer earns a second chance

Finally, there's Igor Fraga, an ex-Red Bull junior who once beat Liam Lawson, Yuki Tsunoda and Franco Colapinto to the Toyota Racing Series crown before COVID effectively wrecked plans for him to stay in FIA F3 in 2021 and brought his 'first' career to a shuddering halt.

The *Gran Turismo* Esports star has, however, found success since he moved back to Japan – where he was born to Brazilian parents and spent his formative years – in 2022 and picked up drives in GT300 and Super Formula Lights the following season. From there, he became Nakajima Racing's Super Formula reserve, which put him in the perfect position to step up to a race drive when Naoki Yamamoto quit the series.

"Being on the Super Formula grid is something I've been working hard on for the past few years," enthuses Fraga. "It's a big opportunity and I believe it can lead to other chances if I have a good season. It's a turning point for me."

O'Sullivan, Rasmussen and Fraga are part of a bumper rookie crop that also features Nissan GT500 driver Mitsunori Takaboshi, who partners Rasmussen at Impul, and Honda protege Syun Koide, who steps up as the reigning Lights champion with B-Max Racing. 🌸



INDYCAR PREPARES FOR A VENETIAN BLINDER

Italian powerhouse Prema Racing has dominated single-seaters in Europe for the past decade. Now it's set to take on Ganassi, Penske and co as its IndyCar debut looms fast

JAKE BOXALL-LEGGE

PHOTOGRAPHY PREMA AND MOTORSPORT IMAGES



L-r: Ilott, Phillips, Rosin and Schwartzman launch Prema's IndyCar challenge at GM's Charlotte tech base

LEVITT

PICK A RACING CATEGORY in Europe – go on, choose one – and Prema Racing has probably won it. In recent years, the Venetian team's reach has diversified from the European junior single-seater competitions to endurance racing and sportscars, and found success outside of its original heartland. Yet the desire to test itself at the highest levels has continued to burn; now, Prema has embarked upon its latest journey, in the IndyCar Series.

Although IndyCar is a championship with immense global prestige, it retains a sense of parochiality. The modern iteration of IndyCar, far removed from 'the split' and the subsequent reunion with Champ Car, has been reticent to stray beyond the borders of the United States, aside from Canada. But there's much more European interest, particularly since McLaren has enjoyed some success in its return to the US's premier single-seater environment. And so Prema, under the leadership of Rene Rosin, felt that the time was ripe to expand.

"The interest has been there for a couple of years," explains Rosin. "Even more than a couple of years ago, we were looking on what to do next. On one side, Formula 1 is unreachable. And, covering everything from karting to Formula 2, we were looking for something bigger, not only for drivers, but as well for the team itself, the mechanics and engineers. So, two years ago, out came some ideas about IndyCar. We started digging, understanding, and putting down some numbers to see that it's feasible – and by the end of 2023, we took the decision to join."

That's a tight turnaround to get Prema's feet under the IndyCar table. In the intervening year, Rosin's squad has had to procure cars, a supply of Chevrolet engines, personnel, drivers, and get the facilities in Fishers, Indiana up to scratch. It's a huge undertaking – one that the likes of McLaren, which purchased a majority shareholding in the existing Schmidt Peterson team, did not have to endure.

Prema had the luxury of being able to promote a handful of its engineers from other championships to the IndyCar project, but also wanted Stateside experience to ensure it was not diving into shark-infested waters without a flotation device. The long-in-the-tooth Dallara chassis has surely had all of its secrets uncovered, and Prema needs the expertise to unlock performance from the get-go. There's the added challenge of street circuits, more rugged and unkempt versus those that the team has experienced on the F1 undercard, and the altogether alien world of oval races.

Gathering personnel with *savoir faire* of IndyCar's idiosyncrasies has been of high priority, and veteran Piers Phillips has come in as the squad's CEO. The team had appeared to have pulled off a coup with the signing of renowned engineer Mike Cannon, but the American left the team after approximately three months; Rosin >>

INDYCAR 2025 CALENDAR

RD	VENUE/DATES
1	St Petersburg 2 March
2	The Thermal Club 23 March
3	Long Beach 13 April
4	Barber Motorsports Park 4 May
5	Indianapolis GP 10 May
6	Indianapolis 500 25 May
7	Detroit 1 June
8	Gateway 15 June
9	Road America 22 June
10	Mid-Ohio 6 July
11	Iowa Speedway 12-13 July
12	Toronto 20 July
13	Laguna Seca 27 July
14	Portland 10 August
15	Milwaukee 24 August
16	Nashville 31 August



CAN ANYONE STOP PALOU?

If Prema has anyone to look up to in converting European success into making it to IndyCar's upper echelons, then surely Alex Palou can be that inspiration. Now a three-time champion, the Catalan breezed to a second consecutive title in 2024 and likely remains odds-on to defend his crown in 2025. Nobody has managed what the US fanbase would egregiously term as the 'three-peat' since Dario Franchitti won three on the bounce between 2009-11, but Palou is best placed to do so.

The level of competition that Palou and Chip Ganassi Racing will face will largely hinge on the competitiveness of Team Penske, which won races in 2024 but failed to get behind a single contender for a full title tilt; Scott McLaughlin's and Will Power's seasons seemed to be near-opposite sojourns through the 17-race calendar. Neither could find the consistency needed to put Palou under scrutiny, and Josef Newgarden also endured a difficult year, although he reeled off a sublime pass to snatch the Indy 500 win from Pato O'Ward.

Their varying fortunes allowed Colton Herta to claim second in the standings. The Andretti Global team might find going one better a stretch, unless Ganassi and Penske start to make more uncharacteristic errors – or if its new ownership structure puts together a tight ship. Andretti also has the impressive Kyle Kirkwood on its books,

“YOU CANNOT ARRIVE IN AMERICA AND THINK YOU CAN TEACH THEM. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE WANT TO BRING A BIT OF EUROPE INTO AMERICA”

and the solid Marcus Ericsson.

O'Ward should also be in the mix. His excellent car control and terrific pace have been rewarded on occasion over the past few seasons, but McLaren's inconsistency over a season has dulled his title bids. Adding to the challenge, O'Ward will likely have competition from the impressive Christian Lundgaard, who joins McLaren from Rahal Letterman Lanigan Racing.

And then there's Scott Dixon. Was 2024 a blip, or is the Kiwi showing a few signs of slowing down as he nears 45 years of age? The six-time champion struggled to perform his usual trick of finding good results on the less fortuitous days, but he still showed that he's got what it takes to win races.

IndyCar season preview

states that the relationship simply “didn't merge together”. Regardless, Prema's recruitment efforts should mitigate the loss of Cannon.

“You cannot arrive in America and think that you can teach them,” Rosin theorises, sagely. “On the other hand, we are a European team. So we want to bring a bit of Europe into America as well. And we want to do the mix of the two.

“So this has been has been one of the biggest tasks, in trying to make the two things work together and keeping in mind, ‘What does it mean working with Prema, and our team mentality and so on?’ That's basically the main task that we've operated in across the last six, seven months.”

The team's IndyCar knowledge has been augmented on the driving front with the signing of Callum Ilott. The Briton returns to the championship full-time after a year away in endurance racing, albeit with two substitute outings for McLaren in 2024, and has experience of a start-up operation after racing for the Juncos Hollinger team for two seasons – a relationship that turned toxic when Ilott and the team were frequently placed at odds. Ilott, a former Prema charge in Formula 3, will fit in much more at the Italian operation.

During his time at Juncos, in spite of its limited resources, Ilott showed great pace and bookended his second season with fifth-place finishes. Ovals were initially a learning curve, but he soon dialled himself into the nuances of pack racing at eyewatering speeds; he'll need to recapture that burgeoning form on his return to the series, after a year racing – and winning at Spa – in the World Endurance Championship with the Jota Porsche 963.

Robert Schwartzman partners Ilott in the second car. The two know each other well – both were part of the Ferrari Driver Academy together in their junior series days and, helpfully, Schwartzman is another Prema junior product. Rosin felt that, after considering the wealth of options available, the Russo-Israeli – who, like Ilott, was a race winner in WEC last season, in AF Corse's satellite Ferrari 499P at Austin – perfectly fitted the mould.

“Let's say we started to say we wanted to have one experienced driver and one rookie, but the second point to know is what it means to be racing for Prema,” adds Rosin. “We have a bit of Prema DNA within the drivers. There's been a few discussions around drivers, but then automatically it came out that the best duo was absolutely Callum and Rob, and I'm really, really happy to have them both.

“They know what it means to be racing in Prema. They know each other. They've been working together. With that, they were working together, even if in different teams, while they were at Ferrari Driver Academy. They are two drivers with extremely high potential and talent. Look at the results they've done in all their series. This is something that makes the choice become quite natural.”

The drivers are the least of Prema's worries; the object of furrowed brows has

largely been borne of that condensed build-up time. A period of intense preparation means that the team has only just finished its first series of tests, with runs at Thermal Club and Laguna Seca in California at the end of January. That Prema showed impressive pace in its opening runs at Thermal, placing third and fourth in the six-car

test, will have come as some relief – especially after being on-par with the Andretti Global cars. It's only a test, but early signs are encouraging.

Rosin, however, is not getting carried away. He knows that his family's team, started by father Angelo in 1983, has a long way to go to truly find success across the Atlantic. Having a fast car is one thing, but being able to replicate that across a season, make the correct strategy calls, and produce perfect pitstops on demand all take years to master. Wisely, the team has avoided setting itself any wildly ambitious – and hubristic – performance targets for 2025. This is a year to learn, build harmony in the team, and start gathering partners to ensure the operation can be sustainable for years to come. But don't mistake that for a lack of desire: Prema isn't going to America just to fill a space on the grid.

“We don't want to be a number,” Rosin declares. “So that is already something. Having said that, of course, it will be for us a huge challenge, and we need to take whatever we can in the first years. We need to take whatever experience, getting as much data as possible in the first part of the season – but, with the driving duo



JEP



MAUGER

that we have, with the group of engineers we have, the group of people that we put together, I think we can be a surprise to the paddock. Maybe not at the beginning on oval circuits and so on, because this is very, very difficult and very different from what we are used to. But on standard circuits, I think we can give our own opinion.”

The long, illustrious history of IndyCar racing indicates that a European team effectively creating a start-up operation will have its work cut out mixing it with the stalwart American teams that have defined the series. The British Carlin squad was the last to try it, but never truly managed to make its mark across the Pond. Prema has excelled in its 40-plus years of competition, but IndyCar is a truly different challenge – it cannot be overawed by it, but neither can it afford to indulge in complacency.

‘The Prema Way’ might need a little time to adapt to the demands of America’s premier single-seater championship, but there’s no reason why it can’t bloody a few of the more established noses if it plays its cards right. 🍀

‘Prema DNA’ is in both of the drivers – Ilott (top, European F3, Silverstone, 2017) and Schwartzman (above, F2, Monza, 2021)

SPORTSCARS





Porsche double at Daytona

The Porsche Penske Motorsport entry of Felipe Nasr, Nick Tandy and Laurens Vanthoor heads to victory at the spectacular Daytona 24 Hours, opening round of the 2025 IMSA SportsCar Championship. After starting third, the #7 Porsche 963 LMDh led 307 of the 781 laps and defeated the #60 Meyer Shank Racing Acura by just 1.335 seconds. It was the second consecutive victory in the American endurance classic for both the 963 and reigning IMSA champion Nasr. Turn to page 86 for Gary Watkins's account of how Porsche beat top opposition from Acura, BMW and Cadillac. The next round is the Sebring 12 Hours on 15 March.

Photography Porsche

Where Daytona International Speedway, Florida, USA

When Saturday 25 January 2025



#7 Porsche won by just over 1s, allowing Tandy to complete his 24-hour quartet

PORSCHE

IMSA

HOW BMW HELPED A PORSCHE WIN AT DAYTONA

BMW didn't win the 2025 Daytona 24 Hours, though it could and arguably should have. Yet it did ultimately play a part in deciding which of the two factory Porsches prevailed in the opening round of the IMSA SportsCar Championship at the end of January.

The pole-winning BMW M Hybrid V8, in the hands of Dries Vanthoor, was running second between the two factory Porsche 963s when the 14th and final safety car of the race was called with 50 minutes remaining. That led to a tactical call by the Porsche Penske Motorsport squad that was key to the victory for its #7 963 LMDh shared by Nick Tandy, Felipe Nasr and Laurens Vanthoor.

Porsche needed to cover off the Bimmer – the fastest car at Daytona, at least in the daylight hours. It wanted to get one of its cars out ahead for what turned out to be a 38-minute dash to the flag. It opted to split its strategies between the 963 LMDh that went on to win the race and the sister car driven by Matt Campbell, Mathieu Jaminet and Kevin Estre: #7 got four fresh Michelin tyres and #6 only two on the right-hand side.

That gave Nasr the advantage over Campbell through the crunch laps of the 63rd edition of the early-season Daytona enduro, the 58th run over 24 hours. The Brazilian took 10 laps to move to the front ahead of Campbell, who quickly slipped to third behind another driver with four fresh tyres

under him: Tom Blomqvist in the Meyer Shank Racing Acura ARX-06 shared with Colin Braun, Scott Dixon and Felix Rosenqvist.

There was a double irony to the win for #7, which gave Nasr a second straight Daytona victory and Tandy a unique haul of overall victories in all four of the world's big 24-hour races. The faster, or at least the more raceable, of the two PPM entries on Sunday morning was #6, while the BMW was not the contender Porsche believed it was and was out of contention within seconds of the final restart.

The #6 entry had been able to take the lead from the sister car multiple times after the sun came up. It had done so again with Campbell driving late in the penultimate hour, despite a delay while a new rear wing assembly was fitted under yellow with two hours to go. It was Campbell's misfortune that he was at the front of the field at the final yellow: it meant he was always going to receive the strategic short straw.

"We wanted to make sure that PPM had one car in front of the BMW," explained team boss



BMW took pole and played a key role in the final result

GILBERT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Multimatic Ford Mustang
beat rival Chevrolet Corvette
to take victory in GTD Pro

GILBERT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Jonathan Diuguid. “That was our plan based on what we saw at the start of the race: we didn’t have the pace to run with the BMW, but we thought that if we were out front we could control the race.”

Campbell just reckoned he “wasn’t able to fight like I wanted”.

PPM was right that the BMW was the faster car, though not at the time of the fateful tactical call. By then an issue that turned the #24 car into a manically porpoising machine had already reared its head. The BMW that the younger of the Vanthoor brothers shared with full-season partner Philipp Eng, plus Kevin Magnussen and Raffaele Marciello, had a problem with the nose mountings. It may have been caused by a clash with a GTD Ferrari in the penultimate hour, or the catalyst might have come as early as hour two when Vanthoor nerfed the wall during a shambolic pitstop.

Vanthoor had qualified on pole and continued that form into the race: he was 25s to the good when he got it wrong in the pits under yellows. BMW’s LMDh didn’t have the same advantage in the night, but Porsche was under no illusions that, when push came to shove in the final exchanges, the M Hybrid would have the advantage. “In the conditions at the end they were fast,” reckoned Tandy. “Even if they’d been down at the back of the queue [after the final safety car], they would have been favourites.”

Vanthoor, Dries that is, felt the same. He backed himself to do the business at the end. “I would have put myself favourite,” he said.

But then the problem hit with a shade over an hour to go. So severe and so sudden was it that

Vanthoor thought a damper had failed. He still had a headache two hours after the race. “I couldn’t fight with the car like that,” he bemoaned. “I couldn’t outbrake anyone, because if I’d tried, I would have locked up and crashed.”

That was apparent at the final restart. He tagged the back of Campbell and the nose gave up for good. The slow lap back to the pits and the pitstop that followed left the car fourth, a lap in arrears.

This was a race that BMW lost, though nothing should be taken away from Porsche. It didn’t have the fastest car – though there weren’t even tenths in it – but PPM executed perfectly on the way to leading more than 500 of the 781 laps. The winning car crossed the line with barely a scratch on it, and there was only one penalty, for #6 after a pitlane overshoot, between the two cars.

But more than that, Porsche and Penske proved their resourcefulness between practice and the race. The team had been hit by a series of hybrid problems, forcing it to change components related to the high-voltage system half a dozen times from the pre-event Roar test the previous weekend to final practice. Yet it ran through the duration without issue after a dual fix: it changed its procedures and also reverted to a batch of parts carried over from last season.

BMW came within sniffing distance of scoring a second Daytona victory nearly 50 years after its only previous triumph with the 3.0 CSL in 1976. But Penske delivered on the day to reward Porsche with overall victory number 20 on the Daytona International Speedway banking.

GARY WATKINS

RESULTS

GTP/OVERALL

- 1 Felipe Nasr/Nick Tandy/
Laurens Vanthoor**
Porsche Penske Motorsport
(Porsche 963)
781 laps in 24h00m38.019s
Grid 3rd (1m34.280s)
- 2 Tom Blomqvist/Colin Braun/
Scott Dixon/Felix Rosenqvist**
Acura Meyer Shank Racing
with Curb Agajanian
(Acura ARX-06)
+1.335s
Grid 6th (1m34.432s)
- 3 Mathieu Jaminet/Matt Campbell/
Kevin Estre**
Porsche Penske Motorsport
(Porsche 963)
+4.423s
Grid 10th (1m36.576s)
- 4 Philipp Eng/Dries Vanthoor/
Kevin Magnussen/Raffaele Marciello**
BMW M Team RLL
(BMW M Hybrid V8)
-1 lap/+41.244s
Grid 1st (1m33.895s)
- 5 Ricky Taylor/Filipe Albuquerque/
Will Stevens/Brendon Hartley**
Cadillac Wayne Taylor Racing
(Cadillac V-Series.R)
-1 lap/+1m03.626s
Grid 7th (1m34.933s)

LMP2

- 1 Daniel Goldberg/Paul di Resta/
James Allen/Rasmus Lindh**
United Autosports
(ORECA-Gibson 07)
765 laps in 24h01m50.716s
Grid 1st (1m38.676s)

GTD PRO

- 1 Christopher Mies/Frederic Vervisch/
Dennis Olsen**
Ford Multimatic Motorsports
(Ford Mustang GT3)
723 laps in 24h01m29.309s
Grid 2nd (1m45.855s)

GTD

- 1 Orey Fidani/Matthew Bell/
Lars Kern/Marvin Kirchhofer**
AWA
(Chevrolet Corvette Z06 GT3.R)
719 laps in 24h01m44.254s
Grid 16th (1m48.334s)

Pole D Vanthoor 1m33.895s (136.492mph)

Fastest lap Sheldon van der Linde
(BMW M Hybrid V8)
1m35.868s (133.684mph)



Gamble steps up from the McLaren GT3 fold

WEC

ASTON MARTIN BETS ON GAMBLE FOR VALKYRIE

Tom Gamble, 2018 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner, has described signing for Aston Martin to drive its new Valkyrie AMR-LMH in the World Endurance Championship as a “pinch yourself moment”. He revealed that racing in the top class of the series has been his goal since the early end to his single-seater career.

Gamble, 23, will share the #007 The Heart of Racing Valkyrie with Harry Tincknell. Ross Gunn will join them for Le Mans, this month’s 10-hour Qatar season-opener and, most likely, Bahrain in November. It is the latest step on a sportscar journey that began when he jumped off the single-seater ladder after his maiden season

in BRDC Formula 3 in 2018.

“As soon as I went into sportscars in 2019 I was thinking about WEC and the Le Mans 24 Hours,” said Gamble, who moved to the GT World Challenge Europe. “When I went into LMP3 with United Autosports and won the championship that really focused my mind on what I wanted to do. That was around about the time that the manufacturers were really starting to show interest in Hypercar.”

Gamble raced a THOR Aston Martin Vantage GT3 in three IMSA SportsCar rounds in 2022. That led to a successful try-out in the Valkyrie at Jerez late last year.

GARY WATKINS

WEC/IMSA

LAMBORGHINI SEEKS NEW TEAMS FOR SC63 ATTACK

Lamborghini is to begin looking for new partner teams to run its SC63 LMDh. That’s if it can prove the competitiveness of the car during a factory-led programme in the IMSA SportsCar Championship’s endurance races this season.

The Italian manufacturer split with the Iron Lynx team that ran a single SC63 in each of the IMSA series and the World Endurance Championship in 2024, and has taken over the running of the car, forging a link with the Riley Motorsports squad. But it has insisted that it has no intention to continue on that basis in the long term.

“It is not our ambition in the future to be a racing team,”

explained Lamborghini chief technology officer Rouven Mohr. “One step after the other: first we have to consider the improvement of the LMDh, and then if we are competitive and we find the interest of a team to re-enter, let’s see.”

Lamborghini insisted that the WEC remains very much in its plans. Company CEO Stephan Winkelmann described the Le Mans 24 Hours as a race that “gives a lot of visibility” and that he would “love to be back as soon as possible”.

The SC63 retired from its first Daytona 24 Hours last month after less than an hour. Powertrain issues, related to the cooling system, put the car out.

GARY WATKINS



GILBERT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES



BATHURST 12 HOUR

BMW scored a 1-2 at Australia’s Mount Panorama circuit, with the M4 GT3 Evo of Kelvin van der Linde, younger brother Sheldon and Augusto Farfus beating the sister WRT-run car of Raffaele Marciello, Charles Weerts and Valentino Rossi. Marciello passed the Mercedes of Jules Gounon, who shared with Luca Stolz and Kenny Habul, with 20 minutes remaining for second. Ferrari trio Chaz Mostert, Will Brown and Daniel Serra took fourth.

Photograph by Julian Kroehl/BMW



LE MANS/WEC

FORD JOINS HYPERCAR LINE-UP

Ford is heading back to the Le Mans 24 Hours to fight for overall victory in an attempt to repeat its successes of the 1960s, and is to build an LMDh prototype for an entry into the World Endurance Championship in 2027.

The American manufacturer made significant play of its heritage at Le Mans – and its four victories on the trot between 1966 and 1969 with the MkII, MkIV and the GT40 – on the announcement of its first factory bid for outright honours at the French enduro since 1982. So much so that there was no mention of the IMSA SportsCar Championship. But it can be taken as read that its new hybrid contender will race in its back yard, perhaps not in 2027 but

certainly the year after.

Bill Ford, executive chair of the Ford Motor Company, referenced the marque's 1960s successes, as well as its GTE Pro triumph in 2016 with the Ford GT on the 50th anniversary of its first outright win, in the launch statement.

"There is no track or race that means more to our history than Le Mans," said the great-grandson of company founder Henry Ford. "It is where we took on Ferrari and won in the 1960s and it is where we returned 50 years later and shocked the world and beat Ferrari again. We are ready to once again challenge the world, and go like hell! When we race, we race to win."

The importance of Le Mans to Ford in the context of its new programme was summed up by the presence of words from the all three of the wise men of the WEC: Pierre Fillon, president of Le Mans organiser the Automobile Club de l'Ouest, FIA Endurance Commission head

Richard Mille, and series boss Frederic Lequien.

As to detail such as its chassis partner, the configuration of the engine or team that will run the cars, there was none. That will be shared at a later date, said Ford.

Ford's entry should mean 10 Hypercar manufacturers in the WEC, on the presumption that there are no withdrawals before 2027. Representation in the top class is rising to eight this year with the arrival of Aston Martin and will move up to nine in 2026 when Genesis starts racing in the series.

Ford is a latecomer to the party. Exactly why it has taken to now to commit isn't clear. It has long been known to have been considering the LMDh platform in a wide-ranging look at the possible expansion of what is already a massive global motorsport footprint. That includes Formula 1: it is becoming an engine partner with Red Bull Racing from next year.

GARY WATKINS



PORSCHE USES IMOLA AS LE MANS PREP

Porsche will run three-driver line-ups rather than two at the Imola World Endurance Championship round in April as part of its preparations for the Le Mans 24 Hours. The Porsche Penske Motorsport squad is delaying its plan to field just two drivers in the six-hour WEC races to beyond the second round of the championship.

Mathieu Jaminet and Matt Campbell, regulars with Porsche in the IMSA SportsCar Championship, will join the respective #5 and #6 PPM 963 LMDh crews in Italy for the second race in succession after this month's 10-hour season-opener in Qatar. Porsche Motorsport boss Thomas Laudenbach described running three drivers per car at Imola as "the best possible preparation we can do" for Le Mans.

Reigning WEC champions Kevin Estre and Laurens Vanthoor will then race as a duo at Spa in May in #6, Michael Christensen and Julien Andlauer doing likewise in #5. PPM appears to be sticking to its two-driver plan from Le Mans up to the eight-hour Bahrain finale.

Paul di Resta will swap cars at Peugeot for the second year in succession. The Brit returns to the #93 9X8 2024 Le Mans Hypercar to drive alongside Jean-Eric Vergne and Mikkel Jensen. Malthe Jakobsen will race #94 with Loic Duval and Stoffel Vandoorne.

New Alpine recruit Frederic Makowiecki will drive with Mick Schumacher and Jules Gounon in the #36 A424 LMDh. Ferdinand Habsburg, Charles Milesi and Paul-Loup Chatin continue in #35.

GARY WATKINS



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INSIDER

Nick Tandy's enduro record is really something, says Gary Watkins

Nick Tandy's smile was as broad as the Bedfordshire fields his family farms. He'd just triumphed at last month's Daytona 24 Hours, a feat that gave him a record all of his own. He now has a victory – that's overall, to be clear – in each of the major 24-hour enduros after adding another win to his outright successes at Le Mans, Spa and the Nurburgring. “Not bad for a farmer,” he reckoned. Not bad for a driver who started out racing Minis, you might add.

Casting aside such quips, the Porsche driver admitted in the wake of this year's IMSA SportsCar Championship curtain-raiser that he'd been thinking about reaching this milestone for some time. In fact, since he made it three out of four with victory at a delayed Spa 24 Hours in October 2020.

But here's a thing. That victory driving a Rowe Racing Porsche 911 GT3-R made him a winner at all of the 24-hour biggies. Tandy notched up his Le Mans and Nurburgring ‘overalls’, as the Americans like to say, in 2015 and 2018 respectively, but before putting either in the book he'd scored his first Daytona victory in class. That came in 2014 in GT Le Mans in his second year as a Porsche factory driver.

Spa completed a set – and actually a bigger set than a full house at the twice-around-the-clock events. You might remember a story in the pages of Autosport early in 2021 [14 January 2021 issue – ed] celebrating the Tandy victories – overall or in class – not just in that quartet but also at those other sportscar classics, the Sebring 12 Hours and the Petit Le Mans enduro at Road Atlanta (though ‘Quick Nick’ wasn't the first to do it). He notched up his first Petit victory in 2013, two years before that amazing overall victory aboard a Porsche 911 RSR in sodden conditions in 2015. Further class victories were chalked up in 2018 and 2020, while he took the first of a hat-trick of Sebring class successes in 2018.

To save you the bother of counting, Tandy now has a total of 12 winner's trophies from the big six. We can't say that's unprecedented. Tom Kristensen's combined record tallies

of overall wins at Le Mans and Sebring surpasses that figure, even before you add in the Dane's solo Petit triumph to pump up his total to 16. Note the absence of a Daytona victory: Kristensen never competed there, so missed out on the chance to complete what is known as the triple crown of endurance with wins at the self-styled World Center of Racing, Le Mans and Sebring.

That brings me on to how we should judge all these crowns – the triple, the four x 24 quadruple that seems set to become known as the grand slam, and the sextuple? Which is the greater achievement?

That's difficult to say. What we shouldn't forget is that Spa and the Ring were traditionally touring car fixtures, even if the former did start out as a Le Mans copycat. They became sportscar races – GT events specifically – really only this century, which goes a long way to explaining why no one had done the grand slam before.

Laurens Vanthoor is now only one away after triumphing at Daytona alongside Tandy in their Porsche 963 LMDh. Earl Bamber and Mike Rockenfeller are also missing one outright victory, at Daytona and Spa respectively.

There are other winners of three of the four. One is the great Hans Stuck, who won Spa in a tin-top and at the Nurburgring in both types of machinery. He somehow contrived never to triumph at Daytona, despite his two Le Mans wins and three at Sebring.

The absence of a Daytona success also means Stuck failed to complete the triple crown in the races in which prototypes race for overall victory. There are some other notable absentees, endurance legends Jacky Ickx and Derek Bell included. Ickx never won the Daytona 24 Hours, only the early-season Florida enduro when it was held over six hours during the fuel crisis in 1972. Bell never won at Sebring, though he has the suspicion that he did. Some suggest that the Spice-Chevrolet in which he finished second in 1995 somehow contrived to lose a lap on

“‘Not bad for a farmer,’ reckoned Tandy. And not bad for a driver who started out racing Minis”

the official count courtesy of a timing glitch.

Only a select few have managed the triple crown: just 10 drivers. Some pretty impressive names – Dan Gurney, Hans Hermann, AJ Foyt and Hurley Haywood included – are on the list. Tandy has now set the target of joining them by winning overall at Sebring after a couple of near-misses over the past two years.

And should Tandy win the 12 Hours, this March or somewhere down the line, he'll also have completed another quadruple crown of outright wins, one formed of Le Mans, Daytona and Sebring plus Petit. Only one driver, Andy Wallace, has achieved that, so that would be quite an accolade.

And when the arguments start about what is the most important – the triple or quadruple crown or the grand slam – he'd be able to trump anyone. 🍀

ASTON MARTIN LETS ITS HEART RULE

*One of the great Le Mans names is finally returning to sportscar
racing's top flight. And this time it means business*

GARY WATKINS

PHOTOGRAPHY ASTON MARTIN AND MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Aston Martin Valkyrie

ASTON MARTIN

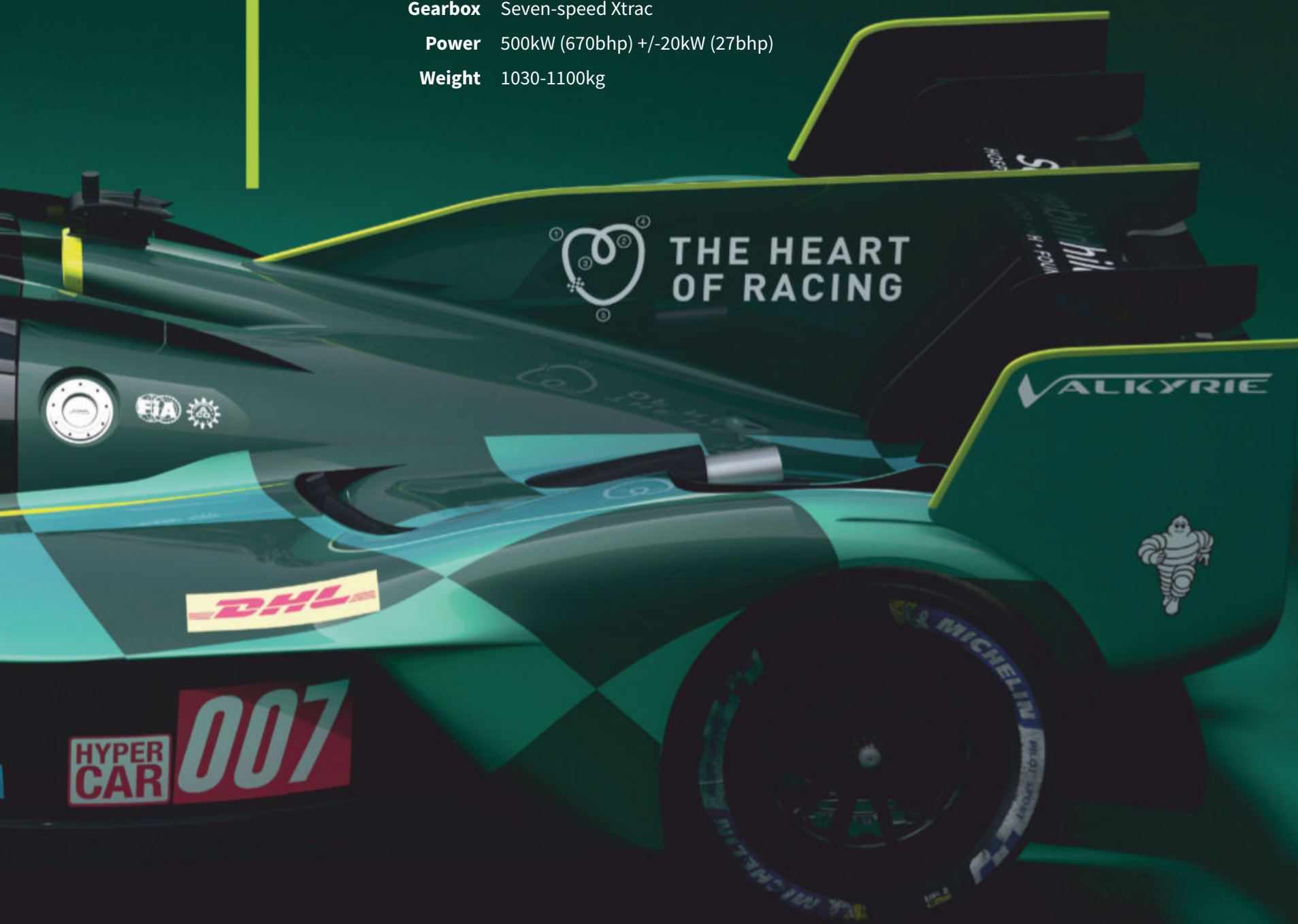


Left: one-car IMSA campaign begins at Sebring 12 Hours

Below: getting onto the podium is the goal for maiden WEC campaign

ASTON MARTIN VALKYRIE AMR-LMH

Engine	6.5-litre naturally aspirated V12
Gearbox	Seven-speed Xtrac
Power	500kW (670bhp) +/-20kW (27bhp)
Weight	1030-1100kg





Aston Martin is back at the pinnacle of sportscar racing. Not just back, but returning with what has to be its most concerted effort to win the Le Mans 24 Hours since its lone overall victory in the big race in 1959. More than that, the British manufacturer will for the first time mount a concurrent campaign in North America. And it is raring to go with a car that is set to capture the hearts and minds of fans around the world.

The Valkyrie AMR-LMH programme, which finally goes into battle when two cars take part in the opening round of the 2025 World Endurance Championship in Qatar on 28 February, has the chance to surpass anything achieved by Aston since its triumph on the Circuit de la Sarthe with the DBR1 driven by Carroll Shelby and Roy Salvadori in 1959. That includes the return of that car the following year in privateer hands, the 'Project' cars of 1962-64, the Nimrod Group C project that started early in the 1980s and the AMR1 at the end of that decade, as well as Prodrive's efforts from the back end of the 2000s up to the disastrous AMR-One of 2011.

Those campaigns were to a greater or lesser extent undercooked. A third place in 1960 was the best they could manage between them at Le Mans. Expect more from the Valkyrie Le Mans Hypercar. It would be wrong to say of a car that was first announced at the 24 Hours in 2019 that it has been six years in the making, because the project lay dormant for three or so of them, but Aston and its factory partner, US-based The Heart of Racing, have been hard at work on the current project since before its announcement at the start of October 2023.

The roots of the present Valkyrie project can be traced further back than that.

The original LMH announced at Le Mans in 2019 was shelved early the following year on the announcement on the eve of the Daytona 24 Hours of what was billed as convergence: a new

breed of IMSA machine, LMDh, would also be able to race in the WEC. Aston's business case involved the sale of customer cars. LMDh undermined that.

Out of the original Valkyrie came a machine known as the AMR Pro, a long-wheelbase trackday variant of the Adrian Newey-conceived machine, but without the road car's hybrid system. THOR, established for a GT Daytona class campaign with the Vantage GT3 in 2020, bought one as a corporate tool. The question THOR patron Gabe Newell put to team principal Ian James was simple: "Why is this car not racing? Because it should be."

That was in 2021, after which James started reaching out to Aston about the possibility of reinvigorating the Valkyrie race programme. "I got a 'no' initially, because the programme had been ended," he remembers. "But I pursued it and slowly the idea gained traction."

A number of stars aligned to make it happen. They included the establishment of Aston Martin Performance Technologies, which acts as a conduit of technology between the race track and road, as well as the introduction of the Formula 1 budget cap for 2021 freeing up resources.

But, in an ironic twist, the LMDh regulations have had a lot to do with Aston's return. The class has been instrumental in the growth of the top divisions of sportscar racing on the world stage and in North America. With Aston's arrival, the WEC now has eight manufacturers. There's one more, Acura, competing in IMSA only, and two with publicly declared programmes on the way: Genesis and Ford. Many of its rivals on both sides of the Atlantic are also its competitors in the road car marketplace. There were compelling arguments for Aston to be involved at a time when Lawrence Stroll wanted to continue the marque's traditions, only "louder and harder".

After the 'new' Valkyrie race programme was launched, a first test, after initial systems running with an AMR Pro, was set for the summer of last year. Aston hit its target: the car ran for the first time at Silverstone in July, first on the Stowe circuit without bodywork and then on the full track in completed form.

Since then, the Valkyrie AMR-LMH has completed more than 15,000km (9000 miles) of testing on two fronts: early running in Europe was followed by a second car coming on stream in North America last October ahead of its one-car IMSA SportsCar Championship campaign that begins with the Sebring 12 Hours in mid-March. That figure includes running at the Losail International Circuit in Qatar before Christmas and continues to rise. The first US-based Valkyrie was undergoing systems running at an undisclosed test venue in Phoenix, close to

THOR's headquarters, as Autosport closed for press.

"I don't think you can say you are ever ready, but we are happy with the mileage we have done," says James, who alongside management duties will continue to

"I GOT A 'NO' INITIALLY, BUT I PURSUED IT AND SLOWLY THE IDEA GAINED TRACTION"

race in the WEC in THOR's LMGT3 Vantage run by the Prodrive/AMR squad. "We have confidence in the car."

Adam Carter, who heads up the Valkyrie programme as Aston Martin's head of endurance motorsport, is equally confident: "We have completed sufficient endurance relative to this stage in the programme, and we will continue to ascertain the need for further development mileage as the programme evolves."

Carter won't be drawn on Aston's plans for Le Mans simulations ahead of the 24 Hours in June, only saying that it "is approaching the demands of doing Le Mans with the necessary preparation". It is known that there is a plan to stay on with the IMSA car at Sebring and put another 12 hours on the Valkyrie the week after the race.

Aston's targets and expectations in the WEC's Hypercar class in season one are "reserved", says James. "We >>



JEP

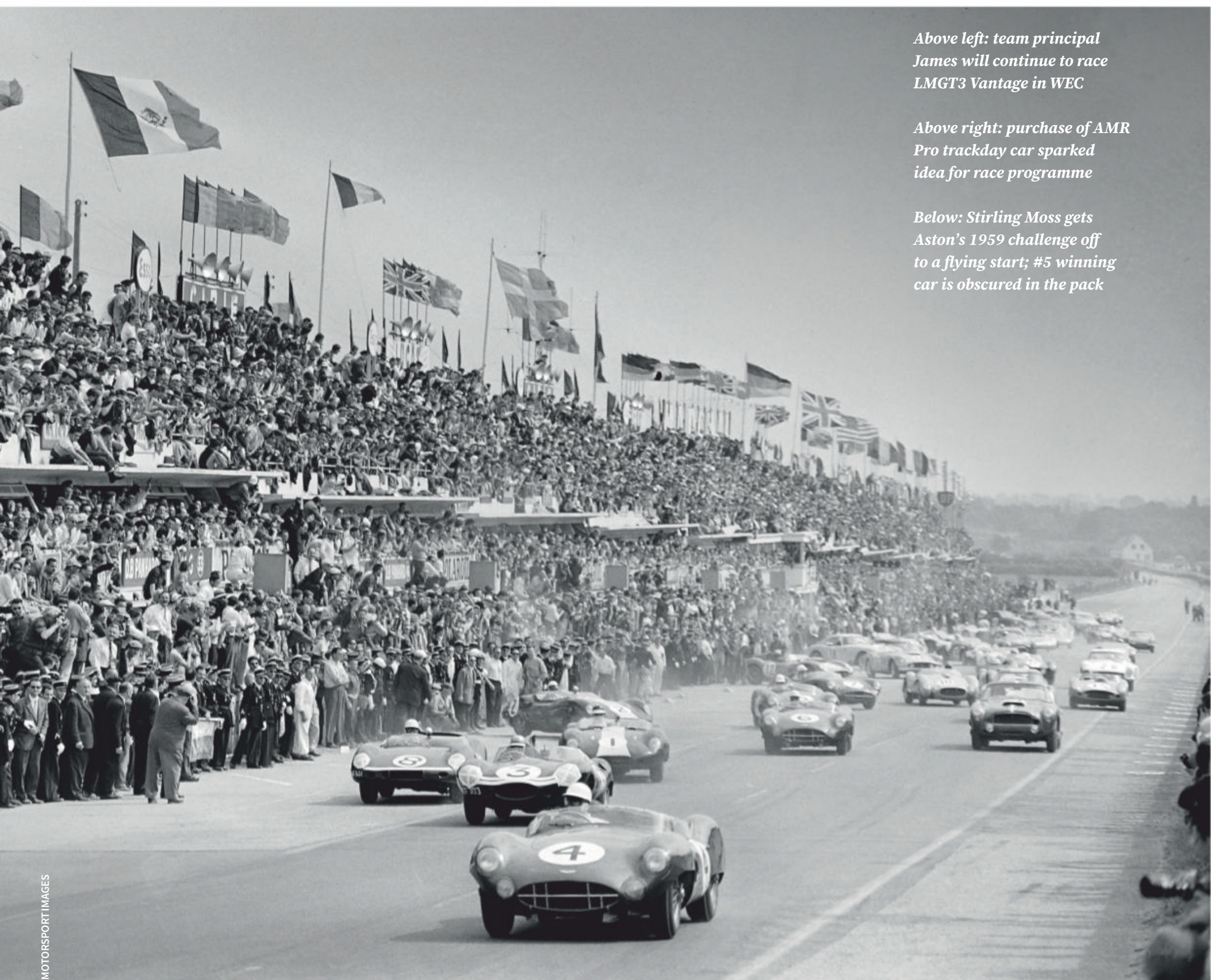


DOMGIBBONSPHOTO/JEP

Above left: team principal James will continue to race LMGT3 Vantage in WEC

Above right: purchase of AMR Pro trackday car sparked idea for race programme

Below: Stirling Moss gets Aston's 1959 challenge off to a flying start; #5 winning car is obscured in the pack



MOTORSPORT IMAGES



ASTON MARTIN

Above: Aston's arrival makes eight manufacturers in WEC

Below: Valkyrie AMR-LMH has clocked up more than 9000 test miles in Europe and North America



DREW GIBSON/ASTON MARTIN

want to run reliably and respectably, and then start moving up the grid through the season. We know that where the performance will be set by the series will put us towards the back of the grid.”

That’s a reference to how WEC organisers the FIA and the Automobile Club de l’Ouest manage the Balance of Performance. They have publicly stated that they will edge newcomers up towards the front, a strategy that was plain to see in 2024 as BMW and Alpine became ever more competitive through the season, to the point where they were both able to get onto the podium before its end.

That is James’s desire too: “I would love to be able to reach the podium in year one. Is that going to be easy? No, because the competition is stacked. But it is a reasonable goal.”

James hints that results might be better in IMSA this year, and not only because the GTP field is slimmer, with five other manufacturers rather than the seven in WEC. “If anything, IMSA want us to be competitive from the beginning,” he explains. “That is the view they have expressed to us; that they will do their best to slot us in straight away. Having an LMH in the series for the first time [racing against the LMDhs] is very important and they want to show the other manufacturers that they can bring their LMHs over and be competitive.”

The arrival of the Valkyrie does complicate the BoP, however, for two reasons. Firstly, it is developed to a different subset in the LMH regulations to the Toyota, Peugeot and Ferrari racing in WEC. There are two columns in the rules titled Prototype and Hypercar: the rules allow a car to be developed from a road car, the option Aston has taken. Secondly, the Valkyrie racer is a non-hybrid. The regulations would have allowed it to use the rear energy-retrieval system of the road car, but Aston from the outset back in 2019 opted against that.

“It is important that the AMR-LMH represents the Valkyrie in its true form,” explains Carter. “At its heart is that V12 engine [developed in conjunction with Cosworth]. “Using that V12 within what is allowed in the regulations and to meet the minimum weight, running as a hybrid was not an option.”

Aston’s message has always been simple. If you have an engine that pushes out 1100bhp when maximum power for the full powertrain in the Hypercar class is a shade under 700bhp, why dilute that with a hybrid system?

“If we didn’t have full trust and belief in the FIA, the ACO and IMSA we wouldn’t be partaking,” says Carter. “That is the great thing about the regulation set: it allows these different technologies to compete on a level playing field.”

That raises a question: will Aston be disadvantaged by running as a non-hybrid? “There are many advantages and disadvantages on both sides,” replies Carter.

“Some people say that because our car is more conventional we are disadvantaged,” offers James.

“But greater simplicity should make life easier for us. There’s a lot to do for the driver.”

Harry Tincknell, one of the first two WEC drivers announced for the THOR entries last November, agrees with that. He describes the constant knob-turning and switch-flicking as a “burden on the driver”, and believes the non-hybrid approach “offers potential to be a bit more consistent”.

Tincknell will form a partnership with Tom Gamble in #007 in the WEC and they will be joined by Ross Gunn for Le Mans, Qatar and, most likely, the eight-hour Bahrain finale in November. Gunn is full-time in THOR’s IMSA entry alongside Roman De Angelis. The Canadian will, similar to Gunn, also undertake WEC duties in the #009 entry with full-time drivers Alex Riberas, who was announced for the programme at the same time as Tincknell last year, and Marco Sorensen.

All six of the Valkyrie roster have links with Aston and THOR. Sorensen is a stalwart of the British marque who signed a new long-term deal last year to extend a stay that began in 2015. Ditto Gunn, who progressed to the factory ranks a year later via its academy scheme. Tincknell, meanwhile, is returning to Aston after winning GTE Pro at Le Mans with the marque in 2020 while racing with Mazda in IMSA. He’s come into the project via Multimatic Motorsports, a key partner in the development of the car and also in the Brackley-based THOR WEC team.

Gamble contested two races in a THOR GT Daytona class Vantage in 2022, and the 2018 McLaren Autosport BRDC Award winner has remained on the team’s radar ever since. Riberas and De Angelis have raced for THOR since its establishment to run the Vantage GT3 in IMSA in 2020. The team has made much of its desire to give people – not just drivers – chances, hence the desire to promote from within.

Putting together an all-British driver line-up in #007 for Le Mans was a no-brainer, reckons Carter. “While we are dictated by performance, the chance to field an all-British car at

Le Mans was a fantastic opportunity,” he says. “When the names went down on paper and we started to arrange them, the opportunity arose.”

There is an excitement among the drivers about the Valkyrie AMR-LMH. Sorensen marvels at the sound of the car, saying “when we ran the engine in full beast mode for the first time you could feel the noise in your chest”. He reckons that “a lot of fans will be heading down to Le Mans just to see and hear the car”.

Tincknell, already a two-time class winner at Le Mans, reckons that his time with Aston could end up being the “pinnacle moment” of his career. “Aston has won Le Mans outright before, but that was back in 1959,” he reasons. “We are now trying to do it again with this unbelievable sounding and looking car, and my name is on the side of it. It’s a pinch yourself moment.” ❄️

**“A LOT OF FANS WILL
BE HEADING DOWN TO
LE MANS JUST TO SEE
AND HEAR THE CAR”**

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR IN WEC 2025

Aside from Aston Martin's arrival, there are plenty of other things to keep an eye on this season

GARY WATKINS

PHOTOGRAPHY CADILLAC AND MOTORSPORT IMAGES

CADILLAC TO DELIVER ON ITS POTENTIAL

Cadillac has been the big underachiever in the World Endurance Championship over the past two seasons. It has just one podium, notched up at the Le Mans 24 Hours in 2023, to show for its efforts. That's a pretty paltry haul given how quick its V-Series.R LMDh has been. Don't forget that the car won the inaugural GTP title in the IMSA SportsCar Championship in 2023.

The Caddy was the fourth quickest contender in Hypercar last season, and probably higher up the pecking order in qualifying – witness Alex Lynn's run of top-fours between Spa and his pole at Fuji. Yet the solo full-season Chip Ganassi Racing-run entry ended up with only a couple of fourths, one of which at Qatar was lost to a homologation infringement.

Now, with two cars run by the British Jota squad, things will surely change. As Earl Bamber, who has shifted over

to the former Porsche customers squad with Caddy, points out, Porsche, Toyota and Ferrari have all had problems getting two cars through the races cleanly on a consistent basis.

"I don't think the results were representative of the pace of the car," says Bamber, whose team-mates weren't declared ahead of Jota revealing how it will split its six drivers. "We didn't always execute; we probably failed to do so in half the races. Because the championship is

British Jota squad aims to deliver on quick Cadillac's potential





JEP

so competitive, if you have one small issue, you can't just drive through to the front. We weren't the only ones to have problems, but we only had one car."

Having two cars for the first time will also help drive forward development. As will Bamber's participation in the full IMSA series with Action Express Racing, bar the Laguna Seca round that clashes with the Spa WEC fixture in May.

"I think a WEC driver doing the full season in IMSA can be really beneficial," explains Bamber. "All the data is shared between Cadillac's teams, but by jumping between the programmes I will be able to humanise all the numbers and squiggly lines. Having that kind of direct input can only drive us forward as a team at Jota and also the whole global programme."

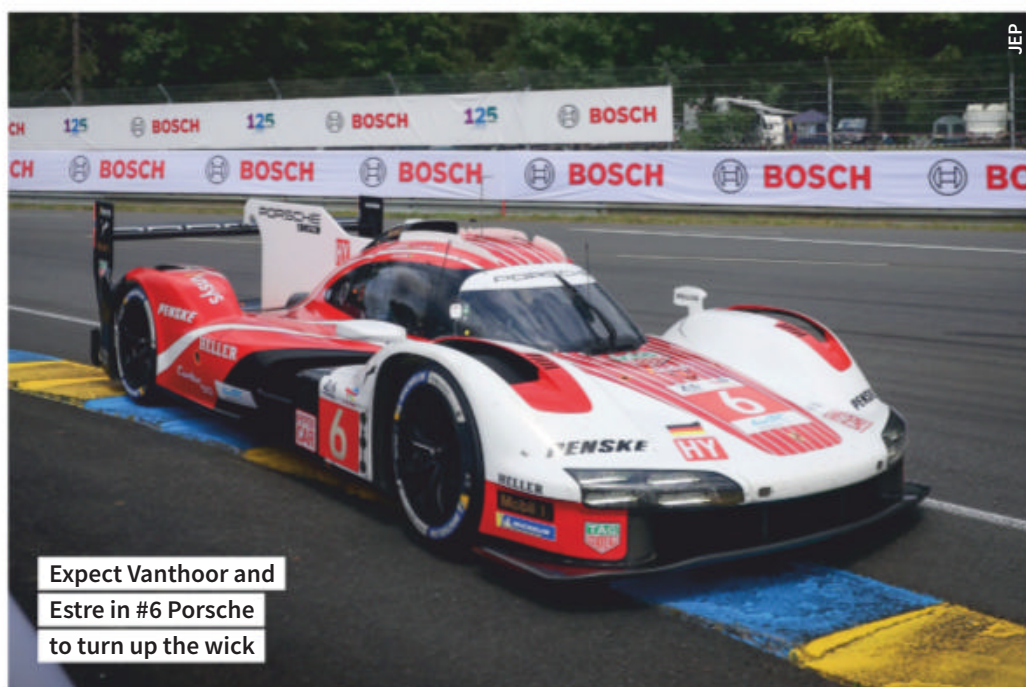
Can Jota put Cadillac into the winner's circle in the WEC? That can't be said for sure, but the team didn't take long to start competing at the sharp end with the Porsche 963.

AN EVEN STRONGER #6 PORSCHE

The title-winning Porsche had amazing consistency over the course of last season. Expect more of the same, and perhaps then some, this time around.

When Kevin Estre and Laurens Vanthoor have a team-mate, it will be Matt Campbell, who will swap over from the Porsche Penske Motorsport IMSA squad for the longer races and at least Imola of the six-hour events. He replaces Andre Lotterer, who wasn't always at the same level as his co-drivers last season, nowhere more so than at Le Mans.

But there are other reasons why Estre



JEP

and Vanthoor might be even stronger this year. PPM believes there are advantages in running six hours with two drivers: more seat time and less compromise on set-up, chiefly. Could it be Porsche's trump card or a disadvantage when it comes to the Le Mans 24 Hours? Only time will tell.

There's another factor that could push Estre and Vanthoor onwards and upwards. They had a new engineering crew last year, so driver and pitwall boffins were still getting to know each other as the season progressed. Estre reckons that, with a year building the all-important driver-engineer relationship, things can only get better.

THE STRANGE CHALLENGE OF THE QATAR SURFACE

The debut of the World Endurance Championship at the Losail International Circuit in Qatar produced a strange affair last year. Its new high-grip but non-abrasive surface caused all sorts of problems on tyre warm-up. Porsche

proved the master of this task, which largely explains why it dominated proceedings in the desert.

A coarser surface puts more energy into the rubber, allowing a driver to push harder sooner. But push too hard on the fine Qatar asphalt, and the driver risks what Hypercar tyre supplier Michelin calls "micro-sliding", which in turn results in graining. That seriously compromises the life of the tyre.

Porsche had an edge on tyre warm-up with its 963 LMDh pretty much throughout 2024. There has been a suggestion that the evo joker performance update on its front suspension has resulted in a step backwards in this respect, but it didn't look like it as the PPM team raced to a second straight Daytona 24 Hours victory in January. The car was the quickest thing in the place during the night when temperatures were at their lowest.

Tyre management will be doubly key over the 10 or so hours of the Qatar 1812Km. The race starts in the day and

>>



Toyota's days as the fastest car appear to be numbered

JEP

finishes at night, with a resulting large swing in track temperatures. Not everyone used both Michelin compounds available in 2024 – Porsche, for example, only ran on the hard – but there could be time to be had for a car making the switch to the medium at exactly the right time.

TOYOTA WITHOUT A PERFORMANCE ADVANTAGE

Toyota finally lost the WEC drivers' title last year after five straight triumphs, but it still had the fastest car across 2024, even if it wasn't as consistently at the sharp end as Porsche. It is expecting any advantage to narrow or disappear this season, and for good reason. The GR010 HYBRID Le Mans Hypercar is entering its fifth season of

competition, and the gains to be made are reducing year by year.

"It's going to be tougher than ever," predicts Sebastien Buemi, who is once again teamed with Brendon Hartley and Ryo Hirakawa in the #8 entry. "Most of the manufacturers will be able to make much bigger steps than us."

It needs to be pointed out Toyota that has no evo joker performance upgrades for this year. They have to be applied for and are approved by the rulemakers according to need. The obvious conclusion to draw is that any developments would not be allowed to the fastest Hypercar in the WEC.

Buemi is expecting the WEC to be ever closer as the Balance of Performance does its job. He points out that this season the WEC is returning to the same tracks at the same time of year. That will make the job

of the ACO and the FIA easier.

"It is going to be tighter than ever," he continues. "I expect everyone to be very close on performance over the full year. Then it's going to come down to strategy, not making mistakes, having perfect pitstops and working on tyre degradation."

They are all strengths of the Toyota Gazoo Racing team. So expect it to be very much in the mix once again, even if it doesn't have a performance advantage.

PEUGEOT FINALLY COMING GOOD

Is this a big year for Peugeot after two full winless seasons following its return to the top of the sportscar tree? It has to be for a manufacturer with three Le Mans wins to its name.



Peugeot's upward trend needs to culminate in a win



New rule set to counter qualifying advantage for lighter drivers

BOTH: JEP



GILBERT

“I don’t know if we have to win or not, but that is the target,” says Peugeot Sport technical director Olivier Janssonie. “In 2024 the races were becoming closer and closer between the cars and the gaps are going to be even smaller in 2025.”

So close will the competition be in 2025 that, Janssonie adds, “any manufacturer can win races”. It will come down to execution and “being on the right tyres at the right time”.

Janssonie points out that the in-house Peugeot team continued an upward trend in those departments last year. It owed its fourth-place finishes at Fuji and in Bahrain (which became a podium after a post-race penalty for Ferrari) to its race gameplan rather than outright pace.

Peugeot has made gains in performance over the winter as it better understands the 9X8 2024 introduced at last year’s Imola round. Then there is the question of evo joker upgrades, which it is known to have applied for. Peugeot isn’t talking about them prior to their final sign-off. “Until they are completely stamped, you are not 100% sure,” explains Janssonie. “When we ran the 2024 car at Imola, we received the final homologation days before the race.”

HEAVYWEIGHT DRIVERS BIDDING FOR POLE

The trend of the lightest driver being handed the baton for qualifying in Hypercar should become a thing of the past. Think the likes of Antonio Fuoco and

Charles Milesi monopolising qualifying duties in their respective Ferrari and Alpine. A new rule is set to be introduced – though hadn’t been announced at press time – that will go a long way to removing the penalty carried by heavier drivers.

It will do so entirely in the first timed session and then in Hyperpole for the fastest 10 cars. Any driver weighing in under a defined figure believed to be 82kg – just under 13 stone in old money – will have to carry ballast up to that figure. For the race the aggregate weight of the two or three drivers in each crew will be calculated and, if below the magic figure, extra kilos will be added above the car’s minimum laid down in the BoP. The system mimics that introduced in LMP1 for 2015 and is widely regarded as common sense. It’s got to be good for the championship.

BMW TO BE IN THE FIGHT AT THE FRONT

BMW was the marque on the move at the end of last year, notwithstanding losing out in the race for fourth place in the manufacturers’ standings to Alpine at the death. One of the WRT-run M Hybrid V8 LMDhs was a genuine contender for victory at Fuji, whereas the Alpine A424 LMDh never was, despite its impressive end-of-season pace.

January’s Daytona 24 Hours proved that the upward trajectory at BMW has continued over the brief off-season, which included the introduction of a joker upgrade of the braking system. The

WEC 2025 CALENDAR

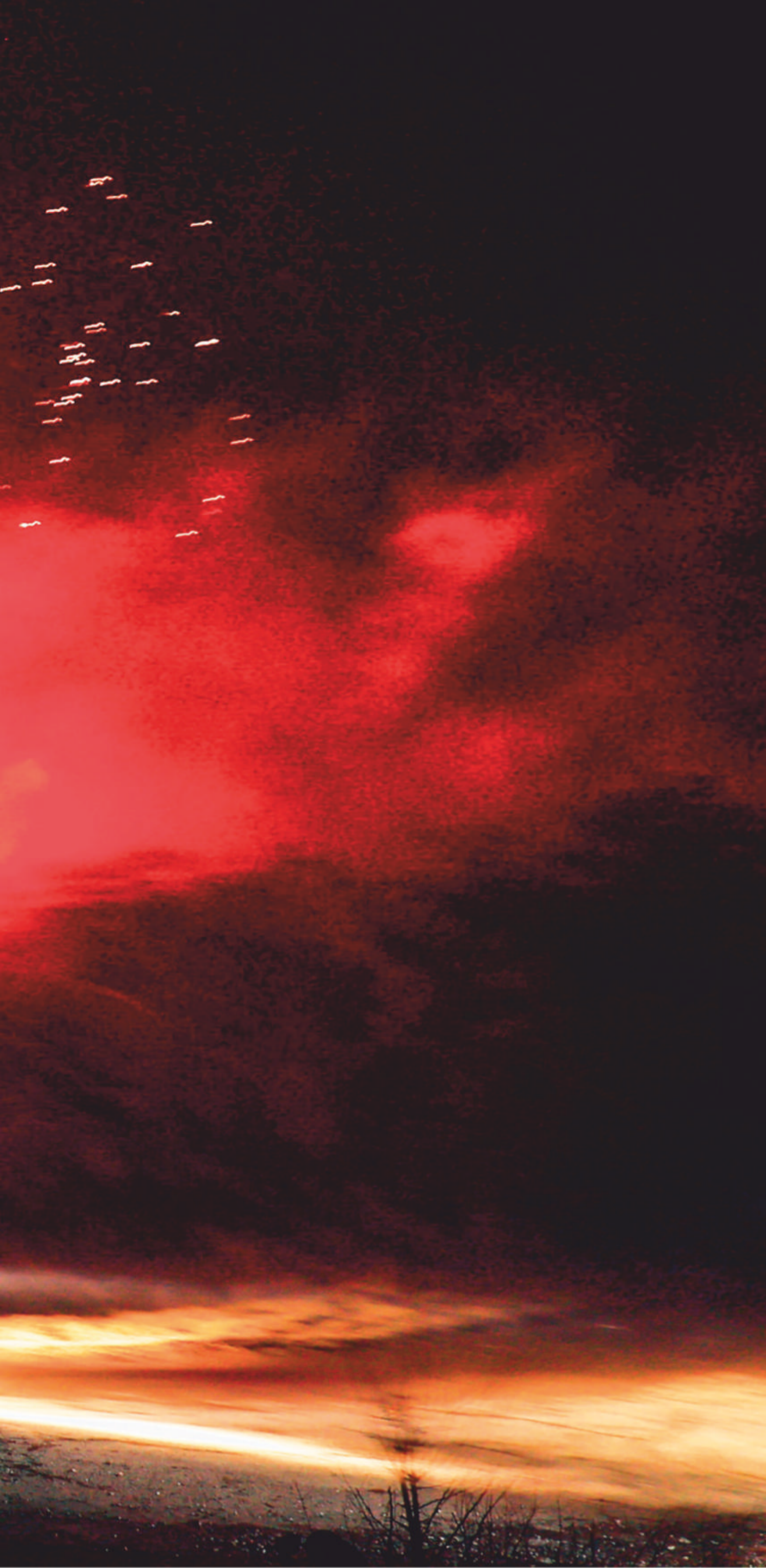
RD	VENUE/DATE	LENGTH
1	Losail 28 February	1812Km
2	Imola 20 April	6 hours
3	Spa 10 May	6 hours
4	Le Mans 14-15 June	24 hours
5	Interlagos 13 July	6 hours
6	Austin 7 September	6 hours
7	Fuji 28 September	6 hours
8	Bahrain 8 November	10 hours

M Hybrid V8 had the edge on speed over its rivals at the IMSA curtain-raiser, at least when the sun was up, and would probably have won the race but for a mounting issue on the nose of the quickest of its cars.

BMW has taken a leaf out of Porsche’s book, at least of sorts, for the new season. PPM has made much of its one-team approach and the free flow of information across the Atlantic between its WEC and IMSA programmes. The decision for Dries Vanthoor and Sheldon van der Linde to race for WRT in the WEC and Rahal in IMSA has been designed with the same motive. BMW believes it is already paying dividends at this early stage of the season. Daytona suggested it isn’t wrong. 🏁

RALLYING





Monte master Ogier fired up

Eight-time World Rally champion Sebastien Ogier heads through the night early on in the Monte Carlo Rally last month, a supermarket ‘slippery surface’ sign helpfully marking the apex. The Toyota star would win six stages on his way to a record 10th victory in the blue-riband event, which kicked off the 2025 WRC campaign. The Frenchman led team-mate Elfyn Evans in a Yaris 1-2-4, with only new Hyundai recruit Adrien Fourmaux preventing a Toyota podium lockout in a dramatic event. See overleaf for our account on how the rally unfolded.

Photographer Tom Banks/
McKlein Photography

Where SS3 Avancon–
Notre-Dame-du-Laus, France

When Thursday 23 January 2025

Details Canon EOS R6m2
RF15-35mm lens, 1/30th @ F/3.2



MCKLEIN

WORLD RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

MORE MONTE MAGIC AS OGIER MAKES IT 10 AT START OF NEW ERA

Even Monte Carlo master Sebastien Ogier made the stark admission that World Rally Championship crews would head into the season opener less prepared than ever given the extent of the changes to the technical regulations. Uncertainty reigned supreme as onlookers attempted to predict who would adjust quickest to the new non-hybrid Rally1 car and, more importantly, the new control tyres supplied by Hankook.

But, as history has proved, you can never write off Ogier on Monte Carlo's

unique asphalt mountain roads. The event's record winner rode his luck at times but, at the age of 41, the class remained ever present to claim an astonishing 10th Monte Carlo Rally win and his 62nd WRC success.

Ogier's Toyota would have led at the end of Thursday night had he not flirted with a ditch that cost him valuable time, which handed reigning world champion Thierry Neuville's Hyundai a two-second overnight lead from Elfyn Evans.

Ogier bounced back on Friday

MONTE CARLO RESULTS

- Sebastien Ogier/
Vincent Landais**
Toyota Gazoo Racing
Toyota GR Yaris Rally1
3h19m06.1s
- Elfyn Evans/
Scott Martin**
Toyota Gazoo Racing
Toyota GR Yaris Rally1
+18.5s
- Adrien Fourmaux/
Alexandre Coria**
Hyundai Motorsport
Hyundai i20 N Rally1
+26.0s

to move into the lead on stage eight. He survived another wild moment on Saturday and was able to extend his advantage to 20.3s.

Changeable weather and a mix of tyre calls meant the opening round of the season was decided over a final-day sprint as Hyundai's new signing Adrien Fourmaux loomed into the victory hunt. Reports of snow on the final Col du Turini stage prompted Ogier and Toyota team-mate Evans to take four snow tyres and two slicks, while Fourmaux gambled with four slicks and two snow tyres.

This appeared to initially favour Fourmaux, who had hauled himself up to third in the penultimate stage. It ultimately came down to a final stage shootout as conditions changed by the minute.

Fourmaux delivered a committed run, but Evans responded to beat the Hyundai driver by 3.5s to hold onto second despite clipping a bank with the rear of his GR Yaris. The pair,



MCKLEIN

New Hyundai recruit
Fourmaux took fine third

however, couldn't stop Ogier from taking the victory, claiming the Power Stage in the process by 0.3s over Evans to grab the five bonus points.

Evans settled for second, 18.4s behind Ogier, but topped the Super Sunday standings, claiming nine of the maximum 10 additional points on offer from the tweaked 2025 points structure. As a result, the Welshman left Monte Carlo as the effective championship leader heading into Sweden (which team-mate Ogier is expected to miss), where he will open the road.

"I have no idea if this will be my last one," said an emotional Ogier. "It would be a good place to stop."

Kalle Rovanner's full-time return to the championship proved a challenging one. The Finn has never been a fan of Monte's roads and it appears that his driving style doesn't suit Hankook's new slick tyre either. Rovanner initially struggled, admitting that he needs to adapt his approach, but managed to salvage his weekend with a fine Sunday to finish fourth.

Ott Tanak showed mesmerising speed to clean-sweep Saturday's afternoon stages but could only take fifth ahead of Hyundai team-mate Neuville, who was left to rue a costly mistake on Friday. The bespectacled Belgian misjudged his braking and ran wide at a hairpin, damaging his left-rear suspension. A puncture followed by an off at the same corner in the second pass of the stage left him mired down the order.

Neuville did recover to sixth after Toyota duo Takamoto Katsuta and Sami Pajari crashed in tricky icy conditions on Sunday. M-Sport Ford's Rally1 debutant Josh McErlean managed to avoid all the drama in what he called a "baptism of fire" to finish seventh. Team-mate Gregoire Munster impressed, notching up his first stage win, and ran as high as fourth before a mechanical issue and then final-day crash provided a sour note to what was a really promising start to 2025 for the Luxembourg.

TOM HOWARD



A.S.O./A.VINCENT/DPPI

DAKAR RALLY

TOYOTA PRIVATEER BEATS THE FACTORY ACES ON DRAMATIC DAKAR

Toyota privateer Yazeed Al-Rajhi defeated factory rival Henk Lategan to claim his maiden Dakar Rally victory last month. The Saudi had always been rapid in the popular rally-raid, especially since it moved to his home country in 2020, but it took a more mature and measured performance to clinch the Touareg trophy at the 11th time of asking.

For almost the entirety of the two-week marathon, Al-Rajhi was trailing the works Hilux of Lategan, whose consistency kept him in front in the overall standings. But when the South African made a rare navigational error on the ninth test, incidentally a day after claiming his first stage win, Al-Rajhi wasted no time to grab the top spot in his Overdrive-run entry.

To Lategan's credit, he was able to bounce back immediately on stage 10 and re-establish the status

quo in the Ultimate class. But when the rally headed deeper into the dunes in Empty Quarters, Al-Rajhi was simply the quicker of the two. The 43-year-old (above) gained nearly nine minutes in a stage that ran for just over 90 miles, to put himself in a strong position from where he would not be usurped.

Al-Rajhi and Lategan were left to battle among themselves in an event during which Toyota was largely unchallenged, with the Japanese manufacturer winning eight of the 12 stages. A revitalised X-raid Mini squad failed to put up a consistent challenge after switching diesel for petrol power, while newcomers Ford and Dacia were still getting to grips with cross-country rallying.

Both Ford and Dacia also lost their star drivers early on in the event, putting them firmly on the back foot. Four-time Dakar winner

Carlos Sainz Sr was prevented from completing the rally after he damaged the rollcage of his Ford Raptor in an accident during the 48-hour special. His former World Rally team-mate Sebastien Loeb, representing Renault's Dacia marque, also fell foul of the same FIA rule on stage three after a rollover of his own.

With two leading protagonists falling by the wayside, Mattias Ekstrom emerged as the best-of-the-rest in third, picking up a win on the penultimate stage as the Raptor became a serious threat by the end of the event. Meanwhile, fourth place was all five-time victor Nasser Al-Attiyah could achieve in the lead Dacia after his bid was derailed by a four-minute speeding penalty and another 10-minute sanction for dropping a spare wheel on stage five.

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New boots for Toyota, Hyundai and M-Sport-Ford

INSIDER

A strong start for a new WRC player, reckons Tom Howard

It's fair to say that the biggest talking point in the Monte Carlo Rally service park prior to the start of the 2025 World Rally Championship was about rubber – to be more specific the new control tyres supplied by Hankook.

You can develop a WRC car to the nth degree, but to translate the hard work into results all comes through the tyres. Understanding how the tyres perform is therefore critical and, with a brand-new player providing the rubber in 2025, teams and drivers were scrambling for data during the off-season. Whoever adapts the fastest to the tyres will no doubt reap the rewards in the long run.

Given Hankook's limited exposure to the world of rallying, there were plenty of questions as to how the tyres would perform. In pre-season testing, drivers offered mixed verdicts but there was one constant – that the winter tyres needed further development.

Being a tyre manufacturer in motorsport is an incredibly difficult and often thankless task. There is little praise and a lot of focus on the failures. Making tyres for the rigours of the WRC is another challenge altogether, with compounds for asphalt, gravel, snow and ice required to tackle the world's toughest terrains.

After winning the FIA's tender in December 2023, Hankook set about developing its tyres to take on the unique demands of the WRC. The process has included nearly 2500 miles of testing on all surfaces, conducted in conjunction with Toyota, Hyundai and M-Sport-Ford.

When quizzed by Autosport, there was a refreshing honesty from Hankook's European motorsport director Manfred Sandbichler regarding the challenge his firm faced ahead of the Monte Carlo curtain raiser: "Luckily we don't underestimate the whole project. We are aware it will be a really tough challenge for us and we have spent a lot of time [developing]. We have good background from our engineer teams, we also hired some real specialists

for this job and so far there was nothing unexpected.

"I want to tell you the truth; if I tell you everything is fine and everyone is happy, it is not true. You can imagine we can't ever satisfy everyone in one shot, especially when you enter such a championship at this level as a newcomer. There are always some regrets and concerns but I can tell you that we have had some positive feedback, and also we get some information that shows we have to improve our product, which is really helpful for us. But in general it was a good cooperation with the manufacturers and teams and this makes me happy.

"You always have to have a Plan B. If something needs to change we will do it. You have to be flexible and you have to listen to the drivers' opinions."

In truth Hankook can feel very proud of itself. Monte Carlo went as well as it could have done for any new tyre company coming into the WRC. There were a couple of punctures but, on the whole, the tyres stood up to the demands that were thrown at them, and appear to be incredibly durable.

"That's the most important thing because we don't want to see the result decided by who is having luck with the tyres," said Toyota team principal Jari-Matti Latvala. "The durability of the

"Being a tyre manufacturer in motorsport is an incredibly difficult and often thankless task"

tyres has been really strong and thanks to Hankook for that. There are some areas where the grip levels could be improved, but as a starting point I think they have done a good job."

The tyres are, however, different from those of predecessor Pirelli, and drivers are still trying to unlock how to get the best out of them. Kalle Rovanpera was perhaps the most negative about the Hankooks, admitting that he now has to change his driving style to get the most out of the slick tyre: "It is very different. I think for me it's quite negative as it doesn't support my driving style, so I have to change my natural way of driving."

But this is all part of the challenge that is motorsport, and will no doubt create storylines as the championship progresses. The first hurdle for Hankook has been navigated but next up is another unique motorsport challenge: the snow and ice of Rally Sweden. ❄️

Ford's desert challenge

Raptor on the Dakar prowl

Ford and M-Sport attacked the famous rally-raid last month. The combo experienced highs and lows but is already planning a second assault for 2026

TOM HOWARD





Podium for Ekstrom and co-driver Emil Bergkvist

MARCELO MARAGNI/RED BULL CONTENT POOL

When it comes to the most brutal events in motorsport, there are not many that come even close to the Dakar Rally. Crews complete an entire Formula 1 season's mileage across 12 stages featuring some of the roughest terrain on Earth. This gruelling slog takes place during a 14-day period that includes only one rest day to recoup the vast energy expended by the competitors, and the teams chasing the cars through the Saudi Arabian desert. To conquer such an event requires skill, determination, luck, fitness and teamwork.

"The Dakar really reminds me of the old Safari Rally, when it was a marathon event, and what you experience in a 24-hour endurance circuit race," affirms M-Sport-Ford team principal Matthew Wilson. "Often Le Mans chooses who wins to a certain extent, and the Dakar is that type of event."

A manufacturer winning the Dakar on its event debut is a rarity, the most notable example perhaps being Peugeot with Ari Vatanen in 1987. Audi was the last big-name manufacturer to throw itself in pursuit of Dakar glory in 2022 and it took three attempts to finally emerge victorious last year, with its RS Q e-tron.

This year, two new players joined the fray: Dacia and American giant Ford. It was the latter that came out on top in this private battle of the newcomers, with its new Ford Performance/M-Sport-developed Ford Raptor T1+ challenger. The programme followed an exploratory Dakar for M-Sport in 2024 with a Neil Woolridge Motorsport-built Ranger.

A dream debut victory ultimately eluded Ford's four-car attack, and it had to settle for a still hugely impressive third and fifth courtesy of Mattias Ekström and T1+ debutant Mitch Guthrie Jr. Although a debut podium is a huge achievement at the Dakar, there was also heartache. Carlos Sainz Sr, last year's victor for Audi and a four-time event winner in all, was making his return to M-Sport, where he'd been a World Rally title contender in the late-1990s and early-2000s. But his rally >>

MCHPHOTO/FORD

was short-lived, and the two-time world champion rolled out of contention during the gruelling 48-hour stage two.

The 62-year-old was able to return to the bivouac and finish the stage, but the FIA determined that the damage sustained to the Raptor's rollcage was too severe to continue. A similar fate befell Dacia's star signing, nine-time WRC champion Sebastien Loeb. An engine issue on the same day as Sainz's roll also put two-time (2004, 2014) winner Nani Roma out of the victory fight, but the Spaniard did deliver an emotional first stage win for Ford on stage 10 (nearly 400 miles). Ekstrom followed up on the next 300-mile test.

Ford couldn't prevent the ultimate spoils in the car category going to the privateer Overdrive Racing Toyota driven by Yazeed Al-Rajhi, who beat the factory Toyota of Henk Lategan.

After a debut of trials and tribulations, third and fifth was met with jubilation after the Blue Oval left its mark on the event, but it's hungry for more. "Everybody was over the moon with the podium, and the job that Mitch did as well was pretty incredible," enthuses Wilson. "I think getting the result, if somebody had offered that before we really got into it, we certainly would have taken it. We always want to win, but I think going to Dakar for the first time ever with a brand-new car and winning is a bit of a tall order.

"We struggled a little bit after we lost Carlos. We know how Carlos is from the past and his drive and determination, and especially at the age he is now, is incredible. To lose him so early on was tough. We were desperate and we could have repaired the car, and it's not to say he would have been able to fight for the win, but if you look at the previous year he won by an hour and 20 minutes and at that point he was only an hour and 30 minutes off the lead. With all that time left in the race there was a chance to get back into the top six. Even if there was no result, his feedback would have been great for us.

"This was a disappointment but in fairness to Carlos he was the ultimate professional. We heard from him every single day after that. He just wanted to know exactly what was happening and that just shows you that even though he wasn't there, he was into every little detail from back at home.

"We felt like we were not on the back foot but we were

"We struggled a little bit after we lost Carlos. His feedback would have been great for us"

obviously down in strength and Nani's engine went at the same time. The second week was all to play for. I think looking back, yes, it was a hell of a good start to the whole programme. On the whole we can be really pleased and I think the great thing is, barring Nani's issue, we hardly put a spanner on the cars."

Competing in the Dakar, let alone finishing the event for a first time, is always a learning experience, especially given the myriad of variables that have to be mastered to be successful in such a rally. It is an experience that Ford wants to build on and has already earmarked the lessons it has learned. Encouragingly, these do not include wholesale changes or improvements.

"The great thing is we've got a really good base and we know we have the reliability," reckons Wilson. "We have to make sure we don't lose that and we evolve it and push it forward and aim

for more speed. There is that saying in motorsport that 'if you stand still you very quickly go backwards'. It's all about the details and the small stuff. I think there are certain things from a car point of view. The way it works, with no homologation, means you can keep evolving all the time.

"We got to a point where we had a cut-off last year where we had to sort of say, 'This is the deadline and anything else will have to go on next year's car', because otherwise we would never have got the four cars built. We have got some things we want to put on next year's car anyway, so that list started even before we went to Dakar. Since we've got back the list has evolved again so there are certain things we want to look at.

"There are little bits on the operational side and how we can streamline everything. When you're there for three weeks the tiniest thing you can do to save people an extra hour in bed or whatever that may be, the accumulation of that over three weeks is huge. Looking after the team is a huge part of it. There's a lot of things, but the great thing for me is we are already into the detailed stuff and marginal gains rather than looking for a magic bullet."

While the dust has settled from the Dakar, it's about to be kicked up again as Ford's rally-raid programme continues with the next round of the World Rally-Raid Championship – the Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge, where two Raptors will do battle later this month. The plan for that and the other three remaining rounds, concluding in Morocco, is to hone the Raptor for the next assault on the Dakar.

"We are very happy with everyone that has been involved – they have all done a brilliant job," acknowledges Wilson. "There is stuff to sort out [regarding the driver line-up for next year] and we are doing the rest of the championship as well, which is brilliant for keeping everyone sharp.

"The idea is we will give all the guys an equal chance in the car to keep them sharp because our rivals are all doing the championship, and we know the best way to be match fit is to do the events. We will be doing it with two cars but we'll make sure all four drivers get the mileage. I think it's massive from the point of view of learning. That will keep us on the right track for Dakar 2026."

In addition to the clout and expertise that Ford is throwing behind the project, M-Sport equally knows what's required for success. After all, this motorsport powerhouse has won rallies and titles in the WRC as well as major endurance races such as the 2020 Bathurst 12 Hour with Bentley. It is this versatility that Wilson believes will help the team achieve its ultimate Dakar goal.

"The Dakar is a lot more like how rallying used to be, and there is also the element of everybody is so crucial, a bit like what it would be in a 24-hour race," he says. "We've got a broad mix of disciplines we can call upon to help and I think that's why we were able to start the project on a good footing."

This first Dakar chapter is merely the start of Ford's Dakar pursuit, and it's fair to say that the scene has been set nicely to build on the narrative. So, can Ford add the Dakar to its glittering list of motorsport achievements next year?

"I certainly hope so," replies Wilson. "This is our number one priority and we will be doing everything we can to do it. With what we've learned this year and the improvements we can make, I'm fairly confident we can go there with a hell of a good chance next year." ❁



US driver Guthrie
fifth on Ford debut



Sainz (right, with team
supremo Malcolm Wilson)
sidelined by shunt



M-Sport celebrates
“a brilliant job”



TOURING CARS





It's time to cut to the Chase

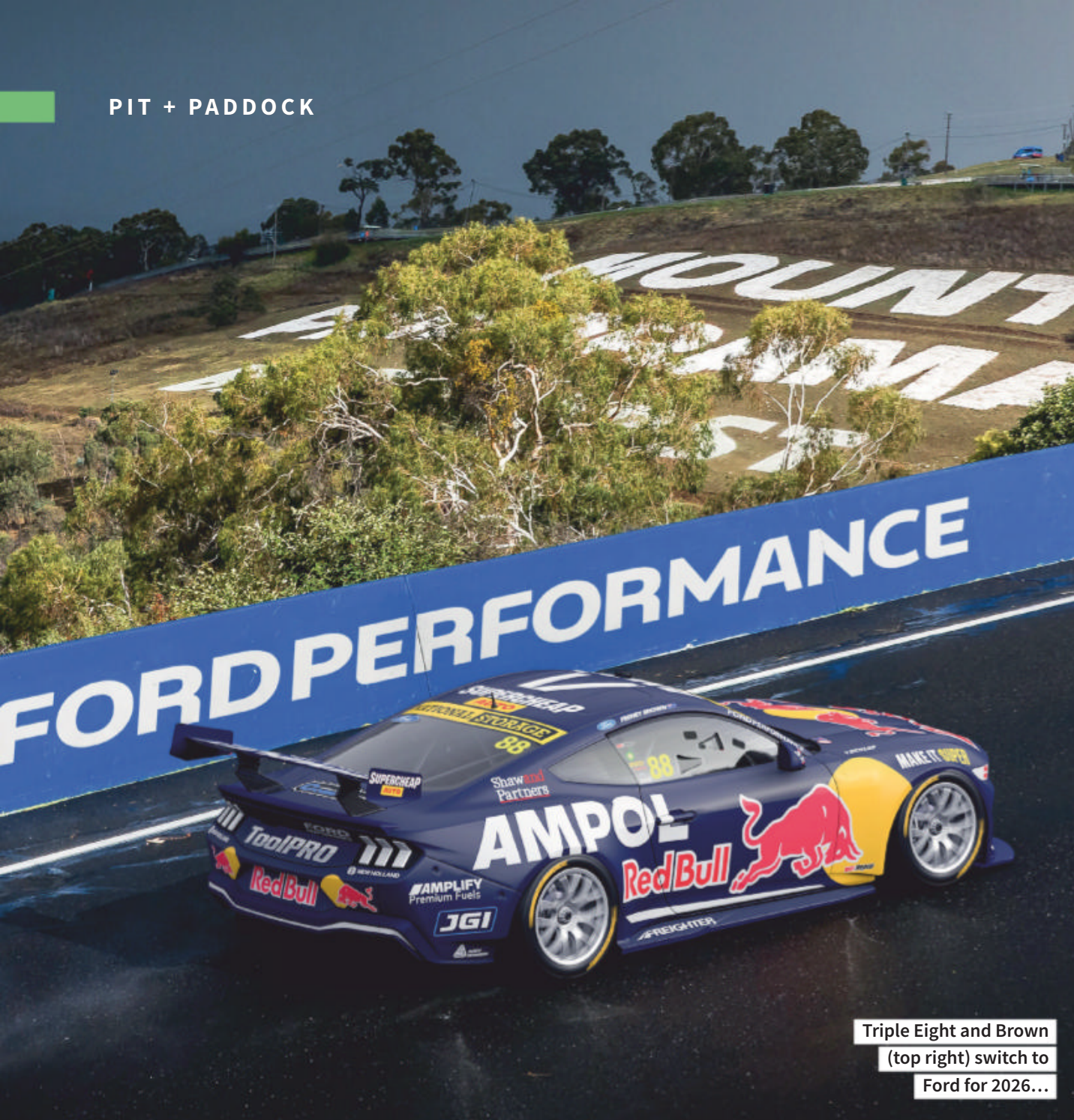
Race winner Chase Elliott leads the field in the Clash, the traditional curtain-raiser to the NASCAR season that took place on 2 February. This year the event moved to the quarter-mile Bowman Gray Stadium, the track's first appearance on the top-flight NASCAR schedule since 1971. From pole, Elliott's Hendrick Motorsports Chevrolet led 171 of the 200 laps – albeit each of them took just 14 seconds to reel off! – to win from Ryan Blaney and Denny Hamlin. Alongside Elliott at the start is Hamlin, with Chris Buescher and Tyler Reddick behind. They were the four heat winners to spearhead the 23-car field, which was completed by a Formula Ford Festival-style last-chance race.

Photographer Sean Gardner/
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Triple Eight and Brown
(top right) switch to
Ford for 2026...

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AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

ALL CHANGE FOR 2025 – AND NOW TRIPLE EIGHT GOES FORD FOR 2026

Australia's annual General Motors-versus-Ford Supercars war starts at Sydney Motorsport Park on 21-23 February with many driver changes, new formats and a last-minute controversy.

Will Brown and Triple Eight enter the season as champion driver and team amid the recent news that both will divest their Chevrolet links at the

end of the season to evolve into a Ford factory-backed team for 2026. How that will play out remains to be seen but, for now, the 26-year-old Queenslander and the Red Bull-backed team are the gold standard in the Supercars pitlane. After such a strong maiden season with Triple Eight, Brown proved himself to be a worthy replacement for Shane van Gisbergen, and team-mate Broc Feeney pushed him hard, making it easy to forget that he is 22 years old.

Elsewhere among the Chevrolet ranks, PremiAir Racing's James Golding was the best-placed non-T8 Camaro pilot in 2024 in seventh place, in spite of not winning any of the 24 races, and he was followed by Nick Percat (Matt Stone Racing). Andre Heimgartner placed 10th for the four-car Brad Jones Racing team, taking an impressive win at home in Taupo in New Zealand.

The added incentive to be the top Chevrolet team – and possibly the Development team for the Camaro project, a role currently filled by T8 – is likely to focus the pressure even more this season, as will the arrival of fresh Chevrolet drivers. Having lost his Dick Johnson Racing seat, Anton De Pasquale, who moves to Team 18, is unlikely to lack motivation. There is also a role to be played by Cooper Murray, whose impressive wildcard outings last year mean a move to Erebus Motorsport on a full-time basis.

Ford drivers battled hard among themselves for third place last season, with Walkinshaw Andretti United ace Chaz Mostert taking the bronze ahead of the Tickford pair of Cameron Waters and Thomas Randle, who was especially strong in the second half of the season. Mostert would like nothing more

than to take a title in a Ford before WAU's incoming Toyota 2026 deal, while Randle and the impressive Matt Payne (Grove Racing) will be looking to bolster their credentials among their more experienced competitors.

But with the greatest respect to Ford's 2024 elite, perhaps more eyes will be on the man making his maiden appearance for the Blue Oval. Brodie Kosteki ended 2024 by reminding everyone of his 2023 title-winning form and would have scored more wins and podiums if not for his absence from the opening two rounds.

Kosteki's off-season move to Dick Johnson's Ford team came with extras: race engineers George Commins and Tom Moore, and Bathurst winning co-driver Todd Hazelwood, have all followed Kosteki from Erebus to DJR. Plus, the team has switched to an Erebus-produced chassis, built by fabricator James White. In other words, Kosteki will drive a car nearly identical to his Erebus Chevrolet, save for its Ford motor and badge.

Cooper and Grove Racing signing Kai Allen will battle for Rookie honours, while all drivers will face racing on a newly developed Dunlop control tyre across multiple events. New race formats are in place and, for the first time, the season will be split into Sprint, Enduro and Finals segments. Post-Bathurst, the top 10 drivers will have their points reset and, at the Gold Coast and Sandown, six drivers will be eliminated until only four go to the final round at Adelaide in title contention. Whoever emerges as champion is almost bound to do so with some controversy.

PHIL BRANAGAN



...but Kosteki
has already done
that for 2025

EDGE PHOTOGRAPHICS/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

**“RONAN WAS
EXCEPTIONAL
WHEN HE TESTED
THE COROLLA –
VERY QUICK”**

CHRISTIAN DICK

BRITISH TOURING CAR CHAMPIONSHIP



TOYOTA GAZOO RACING UK

PEARSON IN TOYOTA, BUT WHO LANDS AT WSR?

After a Christmas and New Year period of tranquility, the British Touring Car Championship driver market had begun to kick into gear by the end of January. At last, aficionados of tin-tops in the UK are getting a clearer idea of how the grid will line up in 2025.

First past the post following the silly season ‘winter break’ was Ronan Pearson with Speedworks Motorsport. Ever since the Scot put in a sparking post-season test performance at Donington Park with the team’s Toyota Corolla GR Sport, Pearson has been the guy Speedworks wanted. All it required was the formalities of his mid-season split last year from Excelr8 Motorsport to reach a resolution.

“Ronan was exceptional when he tested the Corolla – very quick indeed,” raved team boss Christian Dick. “But even more importantly, the energy and enthusiasm he brought with him put the whole team in an overwhelmingly positive mindset going into the winter rebuild. Everybody really picked up on the positive vibes, and we have no doubt that together, we can achieve

some great things in the BTCC.”

Pearson will drive one of the official Toyota Gazoo Racing UK cars, and remains a contender for the Jack Sears Trophy, since his Brands Hatch reversed-grid win last May was his only podium with Excelr8 and the eligibility rules have been tweaked to allow a maximum of one top-three finish. “Alan Gow [BTCC boss] must have been looking out for me because I am still eligible, which is absolutely brilliant,” he joked.

With Pearson the first of the Speedworks quartet to be named for 2025, there remains a lot of water to flow under the bridge. Its 2024

encumbent Rob Huff is still floating around as the parties attempt to put a deal together to continue their relationship. After two wins in his BTCC comeback season, the 2012 World Touring Car king would be a great barometer for the new boy. And the grapevine suggests that there are some other exciting names in the mix.

Over at West Surrey Racing, there’s only one BMW seat to fill and, at time of going to press, it wasn’t necessarily going to be the expected shoo-in of Colin Turkington. The commercial realities of 2025 are such that a deal for the four-time champion cannot be taken for granted, and reigning



TOYOTA GAZOO RACING UK



JEP

British GT champion Ricky Collard has entered an equation that also includes Bobby Thompson.

Collard contested four rounds in 2018 as substitute for his indisposed father Rob, and also competed with Speedworks in 2022-23. “Rob wants it to happen, Ricky wants to do it, but they have to come up with some money,” said WSR chief Dick Bennetts. “He’s quick, and put him in a good rear-wheel-drive car and it’s just a matter of time, but it’s the same old problem [budget]. We’ve got one seat with five drivers in the running for it.”

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INSIDER

Ronan Pearson should excel in a Toyota, says Marcus Simmons

Whether it was intentional or not, the decision of Speedworks Motorsport to take Ronan Pearson to the Donington Park Grand Prix Circuit for a tryout last October was a psychological masterstroke.

The Scot, you see, had split with Excelr8 Motorsport two months earlier in what are widely known within the British Touring Car Championship to have been not the most amicable of circumstances. The Hyundai i30 N Fastback he had hitherto occupied was to be driven from the next round by Excelr8's Mini Challenge talisman Dan Zelos, and that next round was on... the Donington GP Circuit.

So Pearson, in effect, was continuing his intended 2024 itinerary by rocking up at the East Midlands venue; the differences were that it was after that enforced break, and this time he would be in Speedworks' Toyota Corolla GR Sport. The test went so well that the Cheshire squad instantly identified the 23-year-old as a talent it would rather like aboard for 2025, and that has come to pass (see page 115). Pearson will drive one of Speedworks' Toyota Gazoo Racing GB entries this season.

According to whispers from Speedworks, Pearson lapped at the test in a time that would have put him on the front row two months earlier – albeit it was the team's Josh Cook, widely known (but not yet announced) to be behind the wheel of a One Motorsport Honda this year, who put his Toyota on pole. “Obviously there are variables with these days,” admits Pearson, chatting after a day instructing at Knockhill. “The weather wasn't cold yet, so that was ideal. We had the benefit that it was Donington GP, and Josh put that car on pole there, so that was a good foundation to work from.

“Having been out of the car for such a long time you could argue that I was going to be rusty, and that absolutely wasn't the case. So yeah, that day couldn't have gone any better really. It reassured my want to be doing this again, it made me love the sport again, it gave me a good buzz and equally showed that I *am* capable of doing a good job. Yes, it was

only a test day, I certainly don't get ahead of myself, but it's really important to hang onto these things and bits of positivity when you've had a tricky year.”

This is something of a rebuilding winter not just for Pearson, but for Speedworks too. Of its other drivers in 2024, it was clear that the relationship with Aiden Moffat could not continue and he has landed in a West Surrey Racing BMW; Andrew Watson became caught in a spiral and clearly needed a fresh start, wherever that may be; of the 2024 quartet, only Rob Huff remains in the picture to stay on this season. The 2012 World Touring Car champion, indeed, was aboard the other Toyota present at Donington when Pearson took to the track. Pretty awe-inspiring for someone who, as a kid, was something of a tin-top nerd and hero-worshipped the star drivers.

“I've looked up to Rob for a long, long time – I love the man,” he gushes. “He helped me a lot on that last test day. The most help I've ever had in a single day from anyone that's been alongside me, so that was also really, really cool.”

As well as being fast and very highly rated, Pearson is an intelligent young man. He doesn't want to talk about Excelr8 – “I think we'll just park that now, absolutely,” he responds – but the inference anyone can draw from that Huff tribute is that it comes from someone who, during his 1.7 seasons to date in the BTCC, partnered 2022 champion Tom Ingram. Not that it would be directed at Ingram, more at an Excelr8 environment in which he was becoming increasingly unhappy even before the split.

Now Pearson is revelling in being surrounded by old-school racers at Speedworks, from founder and principal Christian Dick to head of racing Danny Buxton and director John Gilbert. For someone who has been pals for a long time with 2021-23 Speedworks team leader Rory Butcher, it's a logical move. “I really like how they operate – I think they're a fantastic bunch of people,” he chirps. “I've always had past connections with Rory, so that relationship was already formed in a very small

“For me it's about pushing this car to its limits, and at the moment I don't know what those are”

part. But I've always looked up to Christian, I've known Danny for a long time as well, and for me it was a little bit of a no-brainer to be honest.”

The feeling among many in the BTCC is that Pearson is a star of the future, given a fair crack of the whip, and you can definitely include drivers such as Zelos and Bobby Thompson in the same bracket. Last year, he got no testing at all with Excelr8 before the official pre-season days; this time, there's a nice programme mapped out: “We've got a lot of positive activities to look forward to, especially considering the fact that the car's had a lot of development, which we can't really touch on. For me it's all about getting acclimatised back in and really pushing this new car to its limits, because at the moment obviously I don't know what those are!”

You can bet on him finding them before too long. 🌟

TAKING STOCK OF A NEW SEASON

Here's what to look out for as the marathon NASCAR Cup campaign kicks off with the crown-jewel Daytona 500

NICK DEGROOT

PHOTOGRAPHY **MOTORSPORT IMAGES**

SHR SHUTDOWN CAUSES SILLY-SEASON FRENZY

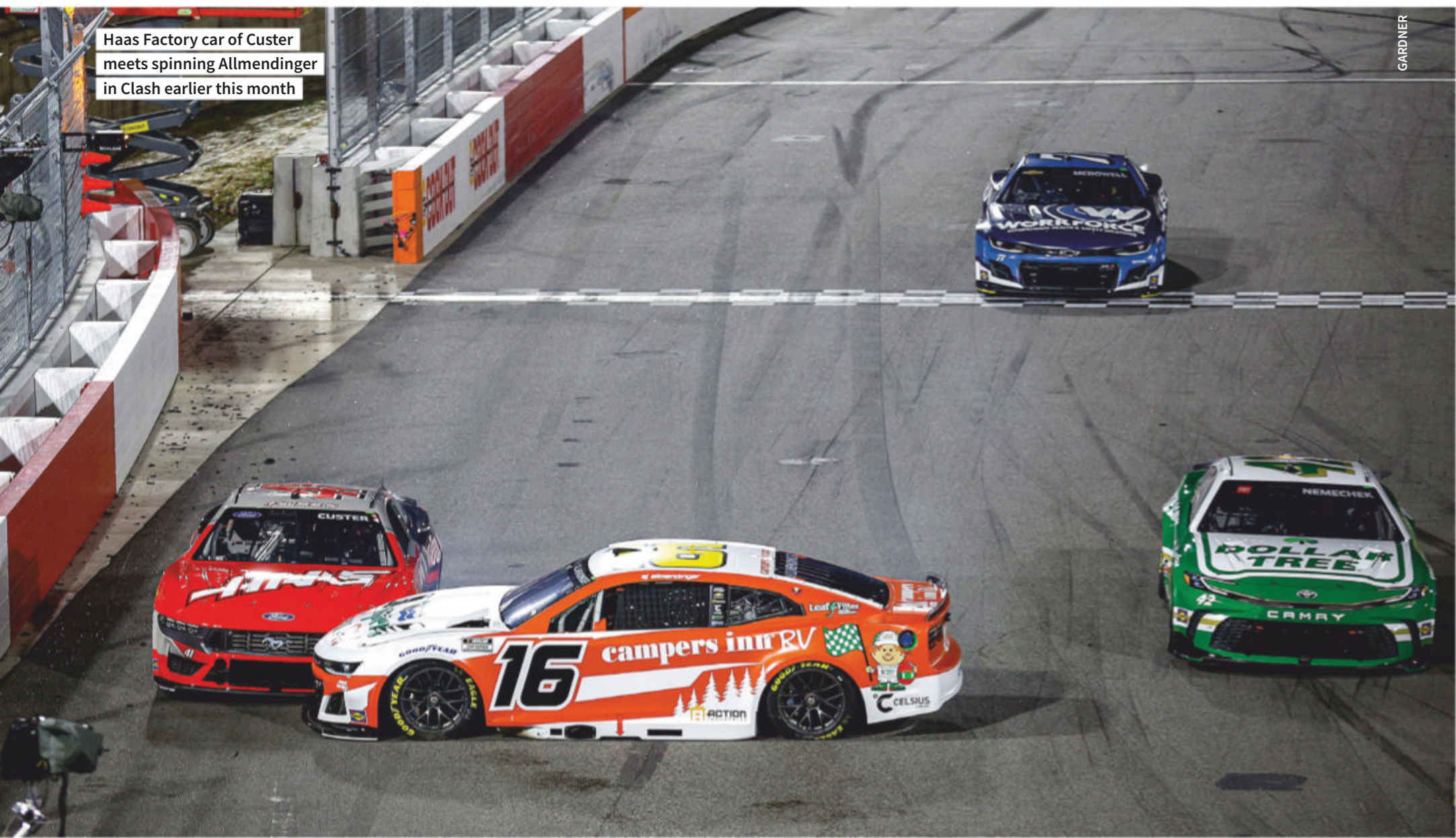
One of the first things you'll notice when cars hit the track in 2025 is how different the field looks. When Stewart-Haas Racing shut its doors after 15 years of operation, it scattered four charters and four capable drivers throughout the field, with all landing in unique places. Chase Briscoe takes over the #19 Joe Gibbs Racing

Toyota from Martin Truex Jr as the former Cup champion retires from full-time racing. Josh Berry now drives the famed #21 Wood Brothers Ford, with Harrison Burton bumped back down to the Xfinity Series. Noah Gragson is now in the #4 Ford – a third car for Front Row Motorsports, whose charter was bought from SHR and only acquired after fighting NASCAR for it in court. Ryan Preece joins RFK Racing, which also expanded by making its #60

Ford a full-time entry, leasing the charter from a lower-tier team.

Oh, and Gene Haas's Cup operation still lives on with the reorganised Haas Factory Team, retaining one charter for the #41 Ford of Cole Custer, who is making a Cup Series comeback after two years back in Xfinity. The two remaining SHR charters were sold to Trackhouse with its newly formed #88 Chevrolet team for Shane van Gisbergen and 23XI Racing for

Haas Factory car of Custer
meets spinning Allmendinger
in Clash earlier this month





Hamlin (top) no longer has Gabehart in his corner

its #35 Toyota with Riley Herbst. SVG and Herbst will also battle one another for Rookie of the Year honours.

SHR was certainly a major catalyst for most of the change in the garage, but it doesn't end there. Michael McDowell and Zane Smith essentially swapped rides, Kaulig Racing has revamped its team with the addition of Ty Dillon and the (wise) decision to bring AJ Allmendinger back to full-time status in the Cup Series, and JTG Daugherty Racing is now known as Hyak Motorsports due to bringing in a new principal owner in Gordon Smith.

CREW CHIEF SHUFFLE

The changes for 2025 are not limited to the drivers' seats. There was some significant news regarding driver/crew chief pairings

going into the new year as well. In a move that caught Denny Hamlin by surprise, his long-time crew chief Chris Gabehart moved into a new role after winning 22 races and never missing the playoffs together. Hamlin admitted that the news came as a 'shock' after six successful seasons together at Joe Gibbs Racing.

Gabehart's replacement will be Chris Gayle, who moves over from the sister #54 JGR Toyota after working with Ty Gibbs since his Xfinity days. With Gayle's transition to the #11 camp, Tyler Allen will now lead the #54 team. Looking elsewhere, Bootie Barker and Bubba Wallace have also split after four seasons together. Barker is one of the most experienced crew chiefs in the Cup garage with nearly 600 races under his belt, but Wallace's new crew chief is Charles Denike,

who has aided several Truck race wins but has never called a Cup race before. With Wallace going two seasons without a race win, the team decided it was time to make a change, but kept Barker in a new role.

While long-time partnerships come to an end in the cases of Hamlin, Gibbs and Wallace, it's a bit of a reunion over at RFK Racing. Brad Keselowski has brought in his former crew chief Jeremy Bullins. Together, this duo came one position shy of the 2020 NASCAR Cup title for Team Penske. But the most interesting move came from a highly respected crew chief who chose to take his talents to a smaller organisation. Rodney Childers won the 2014 Cup title with Kevin Harvick and is credited with 40 wins but, when SHR shut down, he was left in search of a new job. He surely had no shortage of options based on his CV, but he chose to join Spire Motorsports, taking on a new challenge as crew chief for Justin Haley. The Chevy team, which showed steady improvement last year, only has one Cup win and that came over five years ago, but perhaps Childers can help change that.

PLAYOFF SCHEDULE SHAKE-UP

Despite facing a backlash after Joey Logano parlayed a 17.1 average finish into his third NASCAR Cup Series title, NASCAR decided against making changes to the playoff format for 2025. Even so, the playoffs themselves will still look quite a bit different. Homestead-Miami >>



Blue-riband Southern
500 back in playoffs
to kick things off

HANSEN

Speedway, Watkins Glen International and Atlanta Motor Speedway have all been kicked out of the playoffs as part of a schedule shake-up for the upcoming season.

Daytona has regained its spot as the regular season finale, which it gave up for one year due to NASCAR and NBC working around the Olympics. This also means Darlington regains its own position as the opening round of the playoffs with the Southern 500 – one of the sport’s crown jewel events. After that, things get a bit interesting, with WWT Raceway (Gateway) and New Hampshire Motor Speedway now joining the post-season conversation. The St Louis track, which only joined the schedule three years ago, will appear in the playoffs for the very first time, while NHMS

returns after a seven-year absence. Notably, both of these venues only have one date while most of the playoff tracks have two spots on the schedule. But the most dramatic change involves the notorious Talladega Superspeedway. That race, dreaded by drivers, has now become part of the critical semi-final round in a controversial move that is likely to cause chaos. A win in any of the semi-final races guarantees a playoff driver a shot at the title as a part of the coveted Championship 4 and, with Talladega’s reputation, that is likely to get wild.

The rounds will look as follows: Round of 16 (Darlington, Gateway, Bristol); Round of 12 (New Hampshire, Kansas, Charlotte ‘roval’); Round of 8 (Las Vegas, Talladega, Martinsville); Championship 4 (Phoenix).

NASCAR GOES INTERNATIONAL

In a move that left IndyCar officials scrambling (and Pato O’Ward questioning how they were beaten to the punch), NASCAR revealed plans to take the top level of the sport to an international audience like never before. This year’s race in Mexico City will be the first points-paying Cup race outside of the United States since 1958 when NASCAR ventured up to Toronto, Canada. Since then, NASCAR has held some bold exhibition races in Australia (1988) and Japan (1996 and 1998), but none of that counted towards the actual championship. In the middle of the regular season, NASCAR Cup teams will head to Autodromo Hermanos



Mexico City last hosted
second-tier NASCAR
series in 2008

ABBOTT



Larson turned up too
late from Indy for
2024 Coke 600

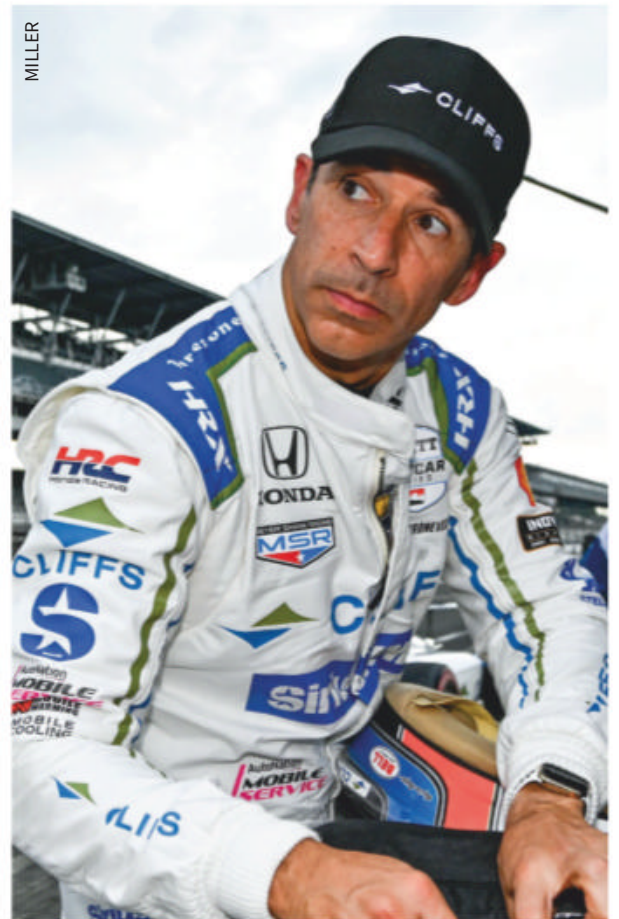
EARP



ROSENBLUM



KINRADE/NKP



MILLER

Left to right: Truex, Johnson and HCN all bid to make 500

Rodriguez on the weekend of 15-16 June.

It's a track not entirely foreign to NASCAR – the Xfinity Series did race there between 2005 and 2008, but most of the field has never seen it before. Since those four Xfinity races in the 2000s, there have been a handful of Mexican drivers who have tried to reach the pinnacle of stock car racing, with none more successful than Daniel Suarez. The Monterrey native became the first foreign-born driver to win a national-level title with his 2016 triumph in the Xfinity Series, and has since become the only Mexican to win at Cup level. NASCAR has expressed interest in expanding further, with some eyeing Interlagos in Brazil, but that likely depends on the success of the Mexico race this year.

A FLURRY OF RULE CHANGES

In the middle of January, NASCAR dropped a laundry list of rule changes that could become major storylines during the year. First among them is the overhauled damaged vehicle policy, or DVP, which was a point of contention throughout the 2024 season. Previously, any damaged car that needed to be towed was immediately out of the race, which seems straightforward, but this became an issue when fully driveable cars with flat tyres were unable to move following simple spins. Since a tow was required, these otherwise unscathed cars fell out of the race. NASCAR tried and failed to deal with this mid-

season in a way it thought was fair, but its efforts only caused more confusion and anger. Now, damaged cars can be towed to the garage and still return to the race later on. The DVP clock, which only gave teams a few minutes to make repairs on pitroad, remains in play but, once the clock expires, the car only has to go to the garage for further care instead of immediately being eliminated from competition.

NASCAR also adjusted how playoff waivers are handled in what some are calling the 'Kyle Larson rule'. Larson missed the Coke 600 after running the rain-delayed Indianapolis 500 last year, requiring a waiver to remain eligible for the playoffs. Now, NASCAR will punish those who seek playoff waivers for anything beyond medical reasons. Exceptions also include the birth of a child, a family emergency, or age restrictions. The penalty is steep. In a case such as Larson's, he will still be granted a playoff waiver, but he would forfeit all of his past and future playoffs points from the regular season. To put it simply, they will start the playoffs in last place no matter what.

NASCAR has also taken aim at the manufacturers after a case of race manipulation in the penultimate event of the 2024 season resulted in a slew of penalties for drivers and teams. Two Chevrolets appeared to run a blockade behind William Byron while the Toyota of Bubba Wallace suffered a mysterious issue just as Christopher Bell needed one more point to advance. Should Chevrolet,

Toyota or Ford employ such tactics in pursuit of the 2025 title, they now risk losing manufacturer points, wind tunnel hours, and other restrictions.

A BATTLE FOR THE AGES TO MAKE THE DAYTONA 500

The drama will start long before the green flag flies for the Daytona 500 on Sunday 16 February, with an incredible field of 'open' entries – cars that are not locked into the race. There are now nine confirmed entries vying for the final four spots on the grid, among them former Cup Series champions Martin Truex Jr and Jimmie Johnson. JR Motorsports, co-owned by Dale Earnhardt Jr, is trying to make its Daytona 500 debut with reigning Xfinity champion Justin Allgaier.

Even four-time Indianapolis 500 winner Helio Castroneves has thrown his hat into the ring with a fourth Trackhouse entry. He can breathe a bit more than the others because he's eligible for the new Open Exemption Provisional, which (if needed) adds an additional 41st spot on the grid for world-class drivers trying to make the race.

Other drivers attempting to fight their way into the 67th running of the Daytona 500 via the Duel races held three days before include Corey LaJoie, JJ Yeley, Anthony Alfredo, Chandler Smith and BJ McLeod. It's the largest entry list for NASCAR's season-opener in a decade, with at least 45 cars planning to show up. 🏁

NATIONAL





CCK bites bullet with Barracuda

One of the more unusual cars seen testing lately is this Plymouth Barracuda. Dating from 1965-66, and sold via McConnells of Montgomery in Alabama, it was given a shakedown at Brands Hatch by Porsche Carrera Cup ace Charles Rainford. The Barracuda was bought 15 years ago by Rainford's father, CCK Historic boss Shaun, who used it as a road car. The intention was always to take it racing, but other projects got in the way. Only when CCK customer Ernst Luthi saw it languishing in the workshop was fresh impetus given. One of its unique features is a bullet hole in the side panel (which has been retained!), and the aim is to tackle this year's Spa Six Hours.

Photographer Gary Hawkins

Where Brands Hatch, Kent, UK

When Monday 20 January 2025

Details Canon EOS-1D X Mark II
EF300mm lens, 1/320th @ F5.6



The 'Rhubarb and Custard' car will be back after 30 years

MOTORSPORT IMAGES

SUPER TOURING

Rare Mazda to return to UK

Watts's 1993 BTCC Xedos among Kiwi-based cars to race at Super Touring Power, as pair of Peugeot 406s could also enter

MARK PAULSON

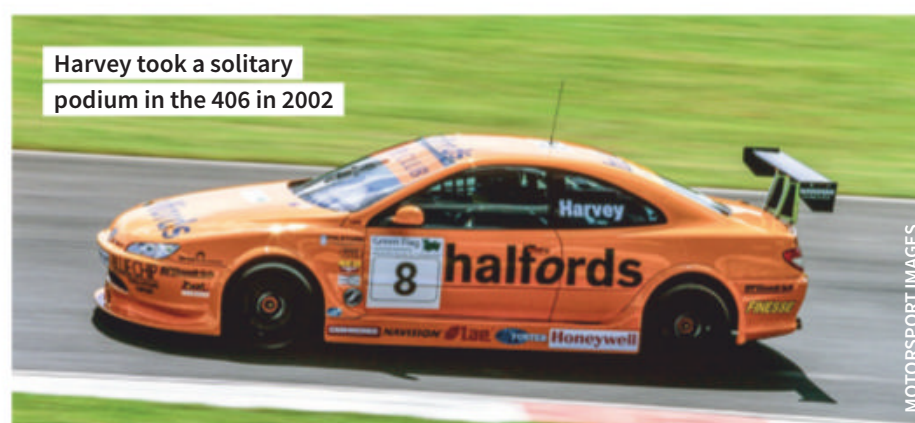
A one-time British Touring Car Championship polesitting Mazda Xedos 6 will make its first UK racing appearance for more than 30 years at Brands Hatch this summer.

The ex-Patrick Watts car from 1993 is among several machines being shipped from New Zealand for the third edition of Super Touring Power on 28-29 June. Affectionately known as 'Rhubarb and Custard' for its livery, the Roger Dowson-built Xedos was fastest qualifier for the season's third round at Snetterton, but Watts spun at the first corner. He later led several laps at Knockhill from his front-row start before

slipping to fourth, but languished 15th in the standings after non-finishing in nine of the 17 races.

Mazda's expanded two-car BTCC squad folded mid-season in 1994, but the original model scooped

that year's Nordic title with ex-Formula 1 driver Slim Borgudd. It returned to contest the Touring Car World Cup at Donington Park before joining the sole surviving 1994 model in North America.



MOTORSPORT IMAGES

Current owner Paul McCarthy acquired the V6-powered Xedos in 2016. "When I looked at its history, it appealed to me that it was a little bit odd," said the Kiwi. "It wasn't one of 30 or 40 cars built. It was one of three, and I love the paint scheme. When we got the car, the engine was quite unreliable and we had to embark on a bit of a project."

McCarthy has contested historic races in his homeland, including in support of Pukekohe's last Supercars event in 2022. A successful run at Hampton Downs last month convinced him to ship the car across the globe. "It's the strongest it's ever felt," he said. "And it just ran faultlessly all weekend."

McCarthy is set to share transportation with fellow Aucklanders Conrad Timms's 1995 Ford Mondeo, a veteran of the first Super Touring Power. A further contingent is expected from New Zealand's South Island.

Also joining the Classic Touring Car Racing Club's Super Tourers grid this year will be former BTCC racer Rick Kerry in an ex-Tim Harvey Peugeot 406 Coupe. The BTC-T car was built by Vic Lee Racing in 2001 before Harvey contested the 2002 season under the Team Halfords banner, achieving a single podium finish.

"I loved touring cars in the '90s and the early 2000s," said Kerry, who won the Gen 1 Cup in TCR UK last year. "The challenge to race with some of them, what I would call my heroes of when I was first getting into racing, sounded like a really decent thing to do while I still can."

Kerry plans a full season in Super Tourers, and may contest further European races in the EDF Motorsports-run car. He has also acquired a second shell, raced by Kiwi Superbike star Aaron Slight in period. "We're going to be restoring that one back into the Aaron Slight colours to have it available later in the season," Kerry added, with a target for it to break cover at Super Touring Power.

P138 THE ORIGINAL SUPER TOURER



Douglass took Ginetta GT title but is in search of co-driver

BRITISH GT

FOX PLANS BGT COMEBACK WITH GINETTA ACE

Fox Motorsport is planning a return to the British GT Championship with a GT4 Ginetta yet is struggling to find a co-driver for its star youngster Mckenzie Douglass, who dominated Ginetta GT last year.

The 17-year-old claimed 13 wins from 21 races to clinch the crown at the penultimate weekend, and has been rewarded with a G56 GT4 to contest his rookie British GT campaign. Fox is a previous series regular and has won races in both classes – its last triumph was with a GT3 McLaren at Spa in 2022 – but has not appeared in British GT since the 2023 Donington Park finale when it ran a Lamborghini Huracan GT3.

Team boss Paul McNeilly said: “We’re pushing so hard to return to British GT, a series in which we’ve been winners in GT3 and GT4 and with one of the most exciting GT talents in the UK in Mckenzie Douglass. We’ve spoken to several potential co-drivers but not found the right fit yet. We’re determined to get it right because this can be



Orange will be joined by Clutton this year

a title-winning programme.”

Douglass, who joined the Essex squad in 2023, said “of course” Fox can challenge for this year’s title but is wary that the team cannot fully prepare yet.

“You’ve just got to look for a confident driver,” said Douglass. “They don’t have to be the fastest in the world but, as long as they can work well with the team and perform consistently, I know it’ll be a good package. The whole package is together; we’re just missing that one final piece.”

The entry list for this year is growing and entails AF Corse

ending Ferrari’s five-year hiatus from the series with a 296 GT3. Elsewhere in the top class, regular frontrunner Marcus Clutton will partner Simon Orange in an Orange Racing McLaren, while Paddock Motorsport will again field Martin Plowman and Mark Smith in its 720S.

Elsewhere, Callum Macleod and Mike Price have swapped a Greystone GT-run Mercedes for an Optimum Motorsport McLaren, the squad also bolstering its GT4 line-up by recruiting Harry George and Luca Hopkinson from RAM.

ED HARDY



AUSTRALIAN F4 CHAMP BACK TO UK

Reigning Australian Formula 4 champion Jimmy Piszcyk will return to British F4 this season with Rodin Motorsport. He finished fifth in the 2023 standings (above) with Hitech Racing before competing in his home country. Piszcyk will be joined in Rodin’s line-up by F1 Academy racer Ella Lloyd.

HILLSPEED GB3 OUTINGS FOR SLATER

Italian Formula 4 conqueror Freddie Slater will contest a partial GB3 campaign with Hillspeed this year alongside the Silverstone Autosport BRDC Award finalist’s main Formula Regional European programme with Prema. There are four GB3 events that do not clash.

GINETTA JUNIOR GOES DUTCH

Ginetta Junior will visit Zandvoort this year, its first overseas trip since racing at Croix-en-Ternois back in 2006. Ginetta revealed that there would be a European event when its calendar was unveiled at the end of last year and has now confirmed the 26-27 July fixture.

OVENDEN, SOLLEY BID FOR JCW SUCCESS

Mini Challenge race winner Tom Ovenden will continue with Excelr8 Motorsport for a title bid this year, after the 2023 Cooper champion ended last season sixth in the points. One of his rivals will be former Cooper star and NAPA Racing UK mechanic Alex Solley, who graduates to the JCW series.



GARY HAWKINS

Cars like the Lola Mk1 will be eligible for the new Sports Racing Series

HISTORICS

EQUIPE REFRESHES ITS OFFERING FOR 2025

Equipe Classic Racing has revealed several tweaks to its portfolio for 2025, including the introduction of a new Sports Racing Cars series, a broadening of its historic single-seater offering, and the long-running BCV8 category ceasing to be a standalone contest.

The new Sports Racing Cars category will cater for both 1950s machinery (incorporating separate drum and disc-braked divisions) and cars built from 1960-65. Cars already signed up include a mix of Lotuses (11s, 15s and 23Bs), Lola Mk1s and Cooper Monacos.

“We’re starting to build some momentum and there’s not a dedicated series for those specific cars,” explained Equipe partner Rob Cull, who added that other categories would also feature GTs. “In the invitation class, one of our drivers has been restoring a beautiful Lister one-off so there will be some really nice bits of kit.”

Cull added that combining cars from the 1950s and 1960s will make it “more of a spectacle and people want to be involved in that”. The races will all feature rolling starts to help protect the cars’ fragile gearboxes.

At the same time, Equipe has also decided to open up its F2 Atlantic series to a greater range of historic single-seaters. Formula Ford 2000 and Classic F3 machinery will also now be eligible and the contest renamed Equipe Formula Libre in an effort to boost grid numbers. The original series struggled to get into double figures during last year’s inaugural season.

Cull said the changes were based upon feedback received: “We work with drivers, we don’t work with promoters. What we’ve realised is that actually what people are wanting is to race with

somebody. It doesn’t necessarily have to be the people in the same cars because not everyone is the same speed. You can have an F3 car going as fast as a Formula Atlantic car, depending on the driver.”

Meanwhile, BCV8, which joined Equipe’s ranks last year after the MG Car Club ceased organising circuit racing, will become a class within the 70s series. “We’re creating a new class in 70s called Group M, for modified cars,” said Cull. “The Class B BCV8 cars can go in there with their super gearboxes and the Class D flat-plane crank engines.”

STEPHEN LICKORISH



Equipe single-seater series is now open to greater mix of cars

GARY HAWKINS

GARY HAWKINS



MIATA TROPHY

NEW Mk4 MX-5 FOR MIATA TROPHY

A new Mk4 version of the Mazda MX-5 has been specially developed for the Miata Trophy and a handful of the cars are expected to compete in the category this year.

The series has primarily featured Mk3 models of the sportscar since the MotorSport Vision Trackdays championship was launched in 2023. But extensive work was undertaken last season to create a specification for the Mk4 that would help boost the longevity of the category.

“The build kits have come from Burton Power, who also developed the EnduroKa one, so it’s a trusted supplier,” said MSVT championship manager Stuart Garland. “MSVT is driver-driven, so we’re looking at what they want. They don’t want an expensive build with all the bells and whistles.

“We’ve developed this over a season and Burton Power have been really helpful with making new parts. We’ve got an exhaust from Piper and they’ve developed the exhaust to the specification we wanted. With Brian [Chandler] from BC Cars we’ve also developed a cooling system for the diff and gearbox. We’ve taken our time on the build to make sure it’s right.”

The Mk4 was tested in some Miata Trophy and Trackday Trophy rounds last year (above) and yielded positive results, while also proving reliable.

STEPHEN LICKORISH

Rally North Wales is among the events cancelled after storms battered Welsh forests



PAUL LAWRENCE

RALLYING

MAJOR STORMS DISRUPT RALLY CALENDAR

Six special stage rallies in the UK and Ireland have been cancelled over the past three months due to extreme weather conditions.

The most recent casualty was the Galway International Rally, which was due to run on 1-2 February but was postponed due to infrastructure damage caused by Storm Eowyn.

As a result of cancelled rallies, contenders in the British Rally Championship will now tackle the notoriously challenging Kielder

forest for the first time in six years on the new Carlisle Stages event.

Following the battering the Welsh forests took from Storm Darragh in December and the subsequent cancellation of the Severn Valley Stages, due to run on 12 April, the Carlisle Stages has been put together in record time for the same date to provide rounds of the British, British Historic and Welsh championships. It will be organised by Colin Heppenstall and his Roger Albert Clark Rally Motor Club team.

Heppenstall will take an idea for the replacement Carlisle Stages from concept through to reality in just 12 weeks. "I am happy that we can help Motorsport UK fulfil the BRC calendar and give

the UK rallying industry a replacement event," he said.

The loss of both Rally North Wales, due to run on 29 March, and the Severn Valley Stages from the Welsh forests this year represents two of six rally cancellations caused by storms and their after-effects. Back in November, the Glyn Memorial Stages at Anglesey was cancelled due to excessive wind speeds and, a week later, the Grizedale Stages was lost for the same reason.

Motorsport UK and Rally4Wales, the organisation that regrades the forest roads after rallies have used them, have both extended offers to Natural Resources Wales – which manages the forests – to assist in the clearance operation. The twin organisations will be meeting with NRW staff every two weeks to update on the situation.

The Galway Rally was slated as the first round of the Irish Tarmac Rally Championship, and organisers are seeking another date. Finally, the Donegal Forest Rally, set for 16 February, was also cancelled due to forest damage.

It is an unprecedented run of cancelled rallies due to extreme weather, and it is hoped that forest rallying in Wales will resume with the Plains Rally on 17 May.

PAUL LAWRENCE

Kielder forest stages last featured in BRC in 2019



JEP



PAUL LAWRENCE

JONES'S NEW RALLY VIVA TURNS HEADS

South Wales rally driver Sean Jones has recently debuted his latest project, a 1967 Vauxhall Viva GT with a 3.5-litre Rover V8 engine. Jones has rallied extensively over the past decade, notably in a Vauxhall Astra GTE and a Chevette HSR, and has built the one-off Viva V8 (above) for club rallying.

PULLING JOINS BRDC SUPERSTARS SCHEME

F1 Academy champion Abbi Pulling, who will race in GB3 this year, has become the first female driver to be selected for the BRDC's SuperStars scheme. Other new recruits include British Formula 4 conqueror Deagen Fairclough and GB3 title winner Louis Sharp.

OIL COMPANY BOSS FUELLED TO RACE

Anglo American Oils boss Anders Hildebrand is planning a return to racing this season, when he teams up with son Axel in Fun Cup. "It's 25 years since I last raced," said Hildebrand, whose last outing was in the 1999 Renault Spider Cup.

NEW NATIONAL NEWSLETTER

Autosport is launching an email newsletter for UK motorsport. It will encompass news stories, features, columns and podcasts related to national motorsport.



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THE RACER



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INSIDER

Marcus Pye on looking forward to looking back

Every year that passes consigns another to history, bringing further opportunities to mark time and reflect. Such was the pace of motorsport's development across the 20th century – quantum leaps of technological advancement in every peacetime decade, never to be equalled – that, as the 21st's first quarter closes out, there is a very special crop of milestones for petrolheads to reflect upon and appreciate.

Two of the biggest, the 125th anniversary of the pioneering American-funded Gordon Bennett Cup race in Europe and the centenary of the first World Championship of Manufacturers in 1925, command attention at Goodwood's Festival of Speed (10-13 July). Vittorio Jano's magnificent supercharged straight-eight Alfa Romeo P2s left rival marques wheezing during that inaugural campaign. The ill-fated Antonio Ascari and Gastone Brilli-Peri won two of the three European rounds in them, at Spa and Monza, the Delage of Robert Benoist/Albert Divo the French Grand Prix. Pete DePaolo (Duesenberg) landed the Indianapolis 500 opener.

Of course, the formalised FIA World Championship of Drivers marks its 75th anniversary in 2025, having started at Silverstone on 13 May, 1950, when Nino Farina led a factory Alfa Romeo podium clean sweep, with veteran Luigi Fagioli and home-grown hero Reg Parnell in pursuit. The sleek 158s, powered by raucous blown 1500cc straight-eights, dominated the six European rounds. Farina and Juan Manuel Fangio won three grands prix each as the Italian edged the crown. Johnnie Parsons (Kurtis Kraft) triumphed at Indy over an all-American field.

At home, Castle Combe circuit celebrates its 75th anniversary this year. Unlike Silverstone, opened in 1948, the Wiltshire airfield perimeter track staged its first two meetings in 1950, in July and October. An F1 race followed in 1955. Combe's history has not been continuous, for there were hiatuses along the way, including a six-year period from 1956 when it staged only motorcycles. Since the 1960s, though, it

has added enormously to club racing folklore – its stock-in-trade – and, importantly, local commerce. The 2025 season-opener, on Easter Monday, 21 April, features the splendid bike-engined 500cc cars, adopted by the FIA as F3 from 1950, thus bringing further synergy.

Autosport magazine, founded by genial Scot Gregor Grant, launched on 25 August, 1950 – three months after Silverstone's landmark F1 race and a month after Combe's trial meeting – thus reaches 75 this summer. Gregor's masterstroke was engaging his equally gregarious moustachioed pal John Bolster to impart his vast technical knowledge from the start. Renowned special builder, racer and deerstalker-hatted commentator, JVB's writings informed and entertained until his death in 1984.

Two significant and intertwined motorsport legends – Chevron Cars and the Clubmans Formula – debuted in 1965, thus their 60th birthdays are to be lauded. Creations of the brilliant Derek Bennett, the Lancastrian marque's first offerings were superb front-engined sportscars built to the new Clubmans regulations. Within two years, Bennett's stunning GTs were taking on, and beating, the world, paving the way for two-litre rivalries with Eric Broadley's Lolas. Chevron single-seaters were winners too, in F5000, F2, F3 and FAtlantic.

Promoted by the British Racing & Sports Car Club boss Nick Syrett, Clubmans created a racing landscape for Lotus 7-type cars that enthused owner/drivers and featured in Goodwood's contemporary era. Hugely influential in diverse careers, Clubmans grids featured future FIA president Max Mosley, F1 design gods Patrick Head and Harvey Postlethwaite, engineering guru Ray Mallock (building on father Arthur's remarkable rootstock), McLaren International co-founder Creighton Brown, and – as a teenaged hillclimber destined for its pinnacle – triple World Touring Car champion Andy Priaulx. Espoused by Autosport editors Simon Taylor and

“There is a very special crop of milestones for petrolheads to reflect upon and appreciate”

Ian Phillips, who both raced successfully, the Clubmans Register will party at Prescott Historique (24-25 May) and Donington Park (19-20 July).

And there's a golden jubilee too, for Formula Ford 2000 – initially branded 'Super Ford' – turns 50. Slicks and wings cousin of £1000 Formula Ford, which spread rapidly from its first race at Brands Hatch in 1967, the Pinto-powered category debuted at Mallory Park, where Ian Taylor (Dulon MP16) made history as its first winner. Palliser, Crossle, Merlyn, Reynard and Hawke drivers joined the roll of honour; Derek Lawrence (Crossle 31F) emerged champion. The Historic FF2000 movement plans special celebrations at Historic Sports Car Club Cadwell Park (24-25 May) and Mallory (6 September). I've lined up a full programme of events this term but sadly, even as a Gemini, can't be in two places at once! 🍷

WHAT NATIONAL MOTORSPORT



MAY LOOK LIKE IN 10 YEARS

*Gazing into the future is a tricky task in an uncertain world,
but Autosport attempts to assess the key challenges and expected trends*

STEPHEN LICKORISH



GARY HAWKINS



Palmer and Chambers both believe EVs aren't the way forward

Predicting the future is never easy. But it has grown much harder in recent years as the world has become ever more turbulent. Unexpected conflict, unpredictable political figures and significant decisions seemingly made on a whim, with no thought of the long-term consequences and those directly or indirectly impacted, all mean taking a look in the crystal ball is a challenging exercise.

But, just because the picture is alarmingly murky, it should not stop us from gazing into the future. “My role is to look forward,” affirms Greg Graham, the British Racing & Sports Car Club’s head of formulae development, whose job is to develop new series. “If you only do the same thing every year, you’re always going to get the same results.”

Yet looking ahead can be fraught with danger, and we can get carried away when predicting the pace of change. When asked what national motorsport’s future may hold, MotorSport Vision chief executive Jonathan Palmer replies: “I think not very different. If you think about how different motorsport was 10 years ago in 2015, or 20 years ago in 2005, the answer is not very.”

Regardless of the size/speed of change, there is no escaping the fact that motorsport faces some major challenges. Here, we assess key areas of the national scene and how they may look in a decade’s time.

THE ELECTRIC QUESTION

For any talk of the future of motoring or motorsport, the role of electric vehicles is a logical starting point. Whether you’re a big fan of the silent machines or passionately despise them, there is no ignoring their rise. It’s not entirely clear which timetable the Labour government will adopt but, from either 2030 or 2035, it will not be possible to buy a new internal combustion engine car in the UK. EVs now account for 19.6% of new car sales on these shores but there is no expectation of Teslas, BYDs or Polestars gliding onto tracks any time soon.

“Government have introduced legislation with a certain percentage of road cars now having to be battery electric vehicles and one can see a logic to reduce city emissions and improve air quality,” notes Palmer. “We know BEVs are bloody quick and capable of immense acceleration, but they’re still very much for short sprints not long distances, and they’re not capable of prolonged high-energy output.

“Formula E was introduced over 10 years ago and it hasn’t spawned other electric series – the Jaguar series [iPace eTrophy for SUV models] was shortlived. The reality is it’s still very expensive and complicated.”

He adds there are many challenges, not least the weight of battery packs, and Palmer’s scepticism towards EVs in circuit racing is shared by Hugh Chambers, CEO of governing body Motorsport UK. “Certainly today, if you take a Tesla, if you go thrashing around Silverstone Grand Prix circuit flat-out, even in high performance with the big battery pack, you’d be lucky to do five laps,” he points out. “Even before that, the battery would probably overheat. Right now, you couldn’t go circuit racing with an electric vehicle, it’s just not possible. You can do a sprint, you can do a hillclimb, but BEVs are not the short-term, near-term future of circuit racing based on production vehicles.”

Further evidence comes from James MacNaughton, motorsport manager for Porsche GB – which produces a variety of EVs – who adds that the next Carrera Cup car will retain an ICE. “Never say never with electric racing, but there are some considerable challenges to overcome with the charging infrastructure,” he reasons.

And that is something Graham has found first-hand. The BRSCC revealed plans in October 2022 to launch Formula Foundation-E, a new electric single-seater series. The machine completed demonstration laps at that year’s Formula Ford Festival but the category has been put on hold amid the logistical, legislative and safety challenges of getting EVs on tracks. “We had a lot of interest,” recalls Graham of the concept. “But to race an EV programme at the moment would be almost impossible as we lack the knowledge and infrastructure. We really did try it with Formula Foundation, but we were coming up against a bit of a wall. The market is definitely ready, but it’s just not possible to put these cars on track in any significant numbers.”

IF NOT ELECTRIC, THEN WHAT?

With EVs currently regarded as inappropriate for the UK’s circuits, the question turns to what *will* be racing on them. And that’s not necessarily easy to answer. “An awful lot of the cars that are used are the A and B segment cars and manufacturers aren’t making them anymore,” points out Chambers. “The Citroen C1s and the Ford Fiestas are going to start becoming vintage or historic cars! You won’t have the donor cars come through for that type of racing. Whether we just spin those cars out for the next 20 years, I don’t know.”

But Graham feels that there are still a few hatchbacks and saloons on sale now that are ripe for racing in the future. “New cars released today with petrol engines, these cars will be 10 years old [in 2035],” he explains. “If we look at what we’re racing at the moment, the DS3, Fiesta ST150s are 10 years old, and the BMW 1 Series nearly are. I think there will still be hardware out there we can go racing in.”

Palmer thinks this will be particularly challenging for top-line touring car racing, with a diminishing number of options, while Classic Sports Car Club director David Smitheram points out that modern machines are very different from their predecessors. For example, the ever-increasing number of automatics has led some racers to request rolling starts because they are not used to getting a manual off the line.

One of the most popular areas currently is categories for 1960s sportscars and tin-tops, but Smitheram is unsure whether that will remain the case in 2035. “The cars will be another 10 years older – they will be 70 to 80 years old – and the same with a lot of suppliers and preparers,” he says. “We have a lot of drivers that are retired – whether they will still be racing in 10 years is questionable.”

But Palmer is optimistic about other branches of the sport, including GTs and single-seaters. The latter he feels will stay “healthy” amid surging interest in F1, with it still being the “goal” for many. >>

The BRSCC tried, and failed, to launch electric series, while Teslas are unsuitable



JEP

MICK WALKER



Categories for 1960s machines are popular, for now, while A segment cars are no longer being built



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THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE FUELS

If EVs are rejected in club racing, and ICE-powered cars remain the norm, it would be naive to think that motorsport can simply ignore the growing calls within society for activities to be more sustainable. After all, driving around in circles burning fossil fuels would be an easy target for campaigners. “We need to find a balance where we don’t put two fingers up at environmental concerns but don’t tie ourselves in knots so much that the sport cannot take place for fear of upsetting someone,” states Smitheram. And this is where sustainable fuels come in.

Already these alternatives to petrol are creeping in. For example, all cars racing at the Goodwood Revival last year were required to use sustainable fuels, and a 100% sustainable fuel was tested in the British Touring Car Championship. Against that backdrop, Motorsport UK launched a consultation about mandating that all series using bespoke race fuels must adopt products with 50% sustainable content in 2026. That drew a positive response and is set to be implemented.

“Sustainable fuels are going to become the norm and I think that helps everybody to publicly and privately down the pub defend why motorsport should be allowed to continue to burn the fuels in an internal combustion engine,” reckons Chambers. “Without doing that, these things can happen quickly, and society can turn on motorsport as it did with fox hunting. A lot of people who live in urban centres and probably don’t drive cars will suddenly decide, ‘What are all these rich people doing driving around burning fossil fuels? They shouldn’t be allowed to do that.’ We’ve got to be 10 steps ahead of the game. The great thing is we’ve got the technology, we’ve got sustainable fuels.”

Now, it’s important not to view sustainable fuels as a panacea that automatically gives motorsport a free pass. And there are some important challenges that remain, not least the cost – which blocks widespread use for now. Instead, other sustainable initiatives should be considered. “There’s a regulation for Carrera Cup and Sprint Challenge teams and drivers to act in a sustainable way and, if they don’t, there will be penalties,” says MacNaughton. “It’s fairly basic things like not leaving hoses running, when washing wheels you must use a basin because you reduce water usage. It’s a lot of little things that are all easy wins without having to spend big amounts of money.”

TECHNOLOGY, TYRES AND OTHER TRENDS

Away from sustainability, another trend we can expect over the coming years is the increasing use of technology. This started when the coronavirus pandemic forced working practices to change, and it is >>



Summers says modern F1 motors are not valid for hillclimbing

HOW HILLCLIMBING MAY HAVE AN ELECTRIC FUTURE

With its relatively free technical regulations, hillclimbing is one area that can offer rapid change in development across the next decade. It’s a branch of the sport with a very modest carbon footprint: the cars run singly, they’re usually active for less than a minute per run, and fuel and tyre consumption is limited.

In many cases, moving to sustainable fuel will come with far less pain, because the amount used represents a smaller element of total cost, so there is every reason to see a bright next decade on the hills.

At the top of the discipline in the UK is the British Hillclimb Championship, and 2015 conqueror Alex Summers sees big changes coming. As a gifted engineer and driver, Summers says that the main difference will be in engines, and a move towards electric motors is probable as alternatives simply run out.

Traditionally, top-specification cars have been powered by recent Formula 1 or IndyCar-type engines. But Summers says that the current generation of

“MODERN ENGINES WOULD BE RUBBISH AS HILLCLIMB ENGINES: WAY TOO COMPLEX AND WAY TOO HEAVY”

powerplants are not valid for hillclimb machinery. “There’s been a happy time, up until recently, where redundant racing engines were relatively plentiful, relatively cheap and relatively simple to

run,” he says. Those days appear to be running out.

“In my view, we will have to go electric when we run out of engines because all the modern engines would be rubbish hillclimb engines: way too complex and way too heavy,” he adds.

Summers predicts that, in the next decade or so, someone will develop a 10kWh, 120kg battery pack for £40,000 and sell an ECU and motor that goes with it. It could prove the perfect power unit for top-level hillclimbing.

“There’s going to be a crossover in the next 10 years where someone, maybe McMurtry or some other motorsport battery company, or one of these graduates who’s a real battery geek sets up a business to make battery packs,” Summers predicts. “That’s my bid: 10, maybe 15 years. The future of top-level hillclimbing is likely to become electric by necessity.”

PAUL LAWRENCE



Sustainable fuels are on the rise and were mandated at last year’s Revival



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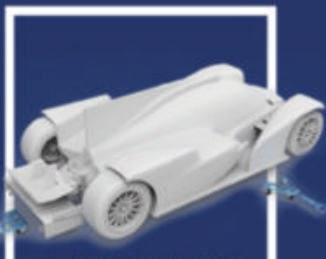
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BREDA RACING EQUIPMENT

National motorsport in 10 years

now set to provide better policing of the notorious track-limits issue. “We’re in the midst of doing an evaluation of track-limit technologies and one of the spin-offs, which is really exciting, is an interface between Esports and real-world sport,” enthuses Chambers. “This allows you, in real time, to capture all the data of where on the track the vehicle is and overlay that into an Esports environment, so you can subsequently race against yourself or race against others and do data analysis.”

Much has also been written and discussed recently about tyre supply concerns, and this is set to remain a hot topic. The trend towards larger tyres for road cars is likely to continue to cause problems for series using smaller sizes. “We’re seeing no one apart from Caterham – I don’t think there’s another manufacturer – that’s making a vehicle on 13-inch wheels,” explains CSCC director Hugo Holder. “The number of these tyres made is going to be minuscule compared to the millions and millions in larger sizes. People like Nova may bring them back, but I think that’s going to have an effect. There are a lot of race cars that still run on 13-inch tyres and will want to do so in the future.”

Another shift is the increasing number of club racers turning to arrive-and-drive options, rather than running a car themselves. The complexity of modern machines and the busy lives we all lead mean getting a team involved is a good option for many.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

No one should be under any illusion about the scale of the challenges faced by club racing. A gradually declining number of licence holders, an ageing competitor and volunteer demographic, ever-increasing costs and navigating the environmental questions are all major threats. But these difficulties do not mean that UK motorsport cannot thrive. Palmer suggests that the rise in autonomous vehicles and tougher speed restrictions could leave more people wanting to get onto tracks: “The consequence of driving becoming censored is driving on public roads is a pretty dull experience. That means the thrill of getting out on track, whether for a trackday or racing, is going to appeal more.” And Smitheram is optimistic that club racing has an important part to play over the next 10 years, even if he is less certain about 20 years’ time. “I’m really, really positive,” adds Chambers. “Motorsport has got some real headwinds, we don’t have a tailwind anymore. For 120 years, we benefited from the explosion of the car as a source of freedom. Now, the winds of change are in the opposite direction and there are some tough things that we have to battle. I think we’re in good shape, we’ve got a fantastic community out there and we’ve just got to unlock that energy and passion and make sure we continue for future success.”



THE CHALLENGES FACING RALLYING

Over the past quarter of a century, UK rallying has faced a range of challenges, including potential loss of access to the forests, foot and mouth disease and COVID-19. But the biggest one it faces over the next decade is environmental impact. Like other areas of the sport where fossil fuels are consumed, rallying has a journey to make, but it can be done and there is every reason to envisage a strong future.

Mike Broad, chair of the British Trial and Rally Drivers’ Association, is as close to the heart of rallying as anyone. He foresees a distillation to fewer, bigger events, and cites another of the leading challenges as finding event organisers. Broad says encouraging more clubs to come

“A LOT OF RETIRED PEOPLE ORGANISE RALLIES AND WE NEED TO FIND NEW YOUNG ORGANISERS”

together to run rallies is logical. “A lot of retired people organise rallies and we need to find new young organisers,” he adds.

It is the environmental issue that will occupy discussion and rule

changes over the next decade. In terms of alternatives to internal combustion engines, a future for rallying in electric cars seems a long way off, and the hybrid option has already proved to be expensive.

As for other elements of sustainability, tyre consumption is a current discussion point and work has been ongoing to reduce this. “We’re moving slowly in the right direction with tyres, but I think we’ve been sitting on our hands for a bit too long,” reflects Broad.

Like many, Broad is eager not to trigger further cost increases to what is already becoming an expensive sport. With single-day forest rallies having entry fees fast approaching four figures, the discipline has to remain affordable. Despite the challenges, Motorsport UK is working with the Ministry of Defence to bring back former venues, and open up new ones, and this can only be good news.

PAUL LAWRENCE



THE ORIGINAL SUPER TOURER

This Vauxhall Cavalier started its racing life as a rear-wheel-drive machine before the BTCC's halcyon period began and has since found a home in club racing

MARK PAULSON

The single-class Super Touring ruleset created a golden era for the British Touring Car Championship from its 1991 introduction. But the oldest example of its genre dates back another year – and is still going strong, 35 years on.

Ditching its traditional multi-class structure, the BTCC had only two divisions – split at two litres – for a transitional 1990 season. And it was the new two-litre formula that would serve as a blueprint for touring car racing worldwide. While BMW downsized its 2.3-litre Group A M3 to fit the regulations, Vauxhall – BTCC winner with John Cleland's Class C Astra GTE in 1989 – was the first manufacturer to design a car specifically for the class.

The Cavalier GSi now owned and raced by Jim Pocklington was built for 1990 by works squad Dave Cook Racing Services. It spent three years with the team, another among the privateer ranks and, since 1994, has been raced regularly at club level.

"This was the very first one that started it, the very first of the Super Touring type," says Pocklington, who acquired the car in 2002 and restored its works colours a few years later. "I put the car back into the livery which it left the factory in at the end of 1992. But that caused a little bit of confusion, because people thought it was the car that Cleland had the ding-dong with Steve Soper in. But it's not that car, and I've never professed it to be that car."

While not involved in the BTCC's most infamous title decider, Pocklington's car is still a significant model with its own tales to tell. It was built to experiment with rear-wheel drive while Cleland began 1990 in a front-wheel-drive sister car. The regulations offered scope for a RWD configuration if a four-wheel-drive base model was available. With top-level 'pullers' in their infancy, it was worth exploring – just as Andy Rouse did later with the first Ford Mondeo. But, while the Mondeo never raced in that configuration, the Cavalier did – once.

Two-time BTCC champion Chris Hodgetts joined the field at Oulton Park. The experiment was unsuccessful, and the second car subsequently ran in FWD format for a rotating cast of drivers, including Hodgetts, Bob Berridge and German racer Markus Oestreich. Pocklington believes it was his chassis in which future 13-time grand prix winner David Coulthard made his only BTCC start, at Brands Hatch in August. "When you look at the angle of my rollcage through the side windows, it is a different angle to its sister car from 1990," he explains. "The cage goes down to where the differential would be, as opposed to the top of the suspension mounts. And you can pick this out quite clearly in all the pictures."

Serving as a spare car for the next two years, it returned to service, piloted by Cleland, after team-mate Jeff Allam's was written off in a multi-car accident at Donington Park in July 1991. It then spent 1993 in the hands of ex-Formula 1 and Indycar driver Ian Ashley, initially >>



Pocklington now races the Cavalier in CTCRC's Super Tourers series

GARY HAWKINS



Coulthard is believed to have raced the car on his sole BTCC outing in 1990

MOTORSPORT IMAGES



Ex-F1 driver Ashley raced the Cavalier in Demon Tweeks colours in 1993



Pocklington (r) with one of the car's original racers, Cleland, ahead of a Silverstone appearance

While the engine is not original, many other parts on the Cavalier date back to its initial BTCC days

“I bought this and thought it was the bee’s knees. But, when I turned up for the first races, boy that was a fish out of water for me”

as part of Team Maxted’s two-car outfit alongside Ian Khan, before running under engineer Colin Davids’ own banner in the second half of a season yielding only two top-10 finishes.

By now, the BTCC’s development race had rendered the old warhorse obsolete. It was acquired at auction in 1994 by North London motor parts trader Andy Clarkin to replace his Lotus Sunbeam in Modified Saloons. Clarkin found it also suited the ailing Thundersaloons category before focusing on its de facto successor, Formula Saloons.

In the meantime, Vauxhall’s works BTCC operation had switched from DCRS to Ray Mallock’s RML squad, winning the 1995 title with Cleland in the Cavalier’s final iteration before the replacement Vectra arrived. Clarkin snapped up RML’s leftover Cavalier spares, allowing Cambridgeshire-based Empress Race Developments – which tended the car on his behalf – to add the aero appendages that BTCC cars had begun sprouting. But still lacking competitiveness against more modern machinery coming into Formula Saloons, Clarkin upgraded to a 1996 Honda Accord, leaving the Cavalier surplus to requirements.

Enter Pocklington, an Essex-based Rolls-Royce specialist who has now owned the car for 23 years. Coincidentally, given the Cavalier’s own predecessor, Pocklington had been driving a Vauxhall Astra GTE in Road Saloons and was eyeing the next step.

“I had done well in business and I fancied a touring car,” he says. “So I bought this and I thought it was the

bee’s knees. I remember doing a trackday at Brands Hatch and I got on OK with it. But then, when I turned up for the first meeting in Formula Saloons, boy oh boy, that was a fish out of water for me.”

Pocklington persevered for a couple of years before switching series. “When Formula Saloons folded, I went and did Classic Thunder and they wouldn’t let me run it with those wings,” he reveals. Aero ditched, Pocklington won at Mallory Park and Brands before campaigning a newer Nissan Primera in the Dutch Supercar Challenge. He even spent half a season in the BTCC, driving a Super 2000 BMW, before deciding to fully restore the Cavalier.

“I wanted it back as it was,” he says of the car, which runs a Swindon engine mated to straight-cut six-speed H-pattern Xtrac transmission. “The car was rebuilt with absolutely everything original that I could. The gearbox in it is totally original. The engine is not the original block and head, unfortunately, but I have got them. And there are internals in it from the 1990 engine.

“The front suspension, the top mounts under the bonnet, they look a bit tatty where they’ve been reused. People look at them and I say, ‘Yeah, OK, but they’re original. They are 1990.’ I would rather have slightly tatty, patinated parts that were original. Likewise, a group of lads at Brands Hatch were looking at the airbox, and were saying how rubbish it was, not understanding that I was the owner standing there with them! Little did they know that that was carbon fibre from 1990.”

Pocklington contested the Historic

Sports Car Club’s Super Touring category and appeared at the Goodwood Festival of Speed before his enthusiasm waned after losing good friend Steve Parker to cancer. “He was the man that used to put me in the car and do my belts up,” Pocklington explains. “He was with me forever.”

One last outing at the 2013 Oulton Park Gold Cup – with actor and future BTCC racer Kelvin Fletcher at the wheel – raised money for Prostate Cancer UK before the Cavalier was parked up. Eventually, Pocklington decided it had sat for too long. He reveals: “I was sitting here with my wife and we were talking, ‘I’ve got to do something with the Cavalier – either I’ve got to race it or I’ll split, because it’s silly it just sitting there’.

“That’s when the CTCRC started Super Tourers [in 2022], and I thought, ‘That’s ideal. I’ll have a drive around Silverstone, and it gets the car seen. If I get out of it and say that’s it, I’ve had enough, we’ll sell it.’ So we went to Silverstone, and I got out of it absolutely on fire again, loving it.”

Addressing the previous misunderstandings about its 1992 livery, Pocklington reverted to its 1990 colour scheme. The bug had bitten once more; he’s been a regular in the series and its flagship Super Touring Power event ever since, proud to be driving the oldest car in the field.

“It’s just such a lovely car to drive,” he concludes. “It’s never going to be the quickest car out there, but the fun value of me pedalling it around with those cars is where it is for me, and I love driving it.” ❀

FINISHING STRAIGHT



RALLY SWEDEN

World Rally Championship

Round 2/14

Umea, Sweden

13-16 February

Sweden's round of the World Rally Championship moved to the Norrland city of Umea – closer to the Arctic Circle than to Stockholm – in 2022, thanks to the ongoing search for snow amid global warming.

Last year it was Hyundai part-timer Esapekka Lappi who triumphed in a dramatic rally, but the Finn isn't on the entry list this time. Neither is Sebastien Ogier, winner for Toyota of the Monte Carlo Rally that opened this year's WRC. So that means we're almost certain to see a new championship leader – unless Swedish legend Stig Blomqvist turns up in a Saab 96 to beat everyone. Kalle Rovanpera and Ott Tanak are both winners of the event since it moved to Umea, while Thierry Neuville and Elfyn Evans also have Rally Sweden crowns to their credit. Another to watch is Martins Sesks, on his first outing of the year with the M-Sport Ford team.



McKLEIN



JEP/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

WORLD ENDURANCE CHAMPIONSHIP

Round 1/8

Losail, Qatar

28 February

The series pretty much most-loved by European, Japanese and North American motorsport traditionalists gets under way on a confusing, never-ending series of curves in the Middle Eastern desert. For the second year running,

the WEC gets its 1812 overture with a race of that number of kilometres – which means it's worth 50% more points than the rounds at Spa, Fuji and Austin, among others.

Toyota and Porsche are the reigning Le Mans Hypercar champions in manufacturers' and drivers' respectively. But many will focus on the debut of the Aston Martin Valkyrie. And can the works Ferraris at last win a non-24-hour round?



LEVITT/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

INDYCAR SERIES

Round 1/16

St Petersburg, USA

2 March

The Florida street circuit just off Tampa Bay is justifiably now an acknowledged classic of the IndyCar calendar thanks to a combination of sinuous bends around the city and the wide-open blasts along the waterfront and around the airport, which generally encourage good racing. It's also now the traditional season starter. There is plenty of intrigue for 2025 (see page 80), although hopefully this time around we'll know the winner on the day of the race, rather than a few weeks later...



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FORMULA E

Round 3/10
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
14-15 February

Formula E has moved its traditional Saudi double-header around 600 miles west to the Red Sea coast and the venue that has staged the nation's grand prix since 2021. Naturally, the F1 layout has been truncated into a 3km (1.9-mile) circuit for the electric world championship, with a left-hand cut-through after the opening chicane bringing the cars onto the shoreline blast. Porsche star Antonio Felix da Costa leads the points, although is yet to win a race this season.



MICK WALKER

SILVERSTONE CSCC

8-9 March

Classic K, Open Series, Swinging 60s, Modern/Future Classics, Midgets/Sprites, BMWs, Slicks Series/New Millennium, Turbo Tin Tops, Magnificent 7s, Tin Tops/Puma Cup

The Classic Sports Car Club will be firing the starting gun on the 2025 national racing season with a two-day fixture at the start of March. Expect large entries from its selection of popular categories that span multiple eras, including the diverse mix of models that can be found in Swinging Sixties up to the modern machines in the Slicks Series.



EDGE PHOTOGRAPHICS/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

FORMULA REGIONAL MIDDLE EAST

Round 4/5
Yas Marina, UAE
15-16 February

Round 5/5
Losail, Qatar
27-28 February

ASIAN LE MANS SERIES

Round 3/3
Yas Marina, UAE
15-16 February

NASCAR CUP SERIES

Round 1/36
Daytona, USA
16 February

Round 2/36
Atlanta, USA
23 February

Round 3/36
Austin, USA
2 March

Round 4/36
Phoenix, USA
9 March

AUSTRALIAN SUPERCARS

Round 1/13
Sydney Motorsport Park, Australia
22-23 February

SUPER FORMULA

Round 1/7
Suzuka, Japan
8-9 March

BRITISH RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Round 1/6
East Riding Stages Rally, Beverley
23 February



SCHLEGELMILCH/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

PODCAST This is the time of year for World Endurance Championship fever. Listen in to our sportscar doyen Gary Watkins and Chief Editor Kevin Turner on the Autosport podcast as they discuss Ford's return to the top division with an attack on the Hypercar class in 2027. Inevitably with those two, there's also a look back to previous Ford efforts at the Le Mans 24 Hours. [autosport.com/podcast](https://www.autosport.com/podcast)



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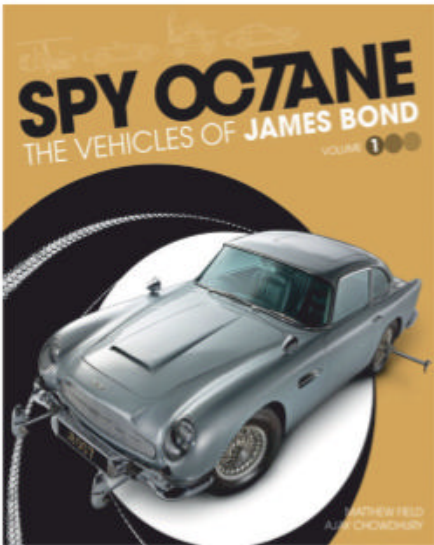
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*Orders made by 1 March 2025 will start with the April 2025 (F1 season preview) issue.



SPY OCTANE: THE VEHICLES OF JAMES BOND – VOLUME 1

porterpress.com
RRP £99

Gadgets and spectacular stunts are a key element of the James Bond franchise’s lasting appeal, and this comprehensively researched book begins the task of cataloguing them. The first volume covers the opening flourish of the popular movie series, from *Dr No* to *Diamonds Are Forever* – that is, Sean Connery’s



HOT WHEELS F1 COLLECTION

hotwheels.com/formula1
RRP £2.30-£79.99

Children of all ages will have been delighted to learn of an extension to the licensing tie-up between F1 and Hot Wheels, the definitive scale model toy car brand. Following last year’s successful limited edition model, Hot Wheels will now cover eight of the 10 teams on the F1 grid in 2025, with both standard and premium collections and two F1-themed racing circuits.

The standard models are

diecast in 1:64 and available now with Red Bull decals; all other teams apart from Ferrari and Aston Martin will become available through spring and summer. The premium models, launching this summer, feature more intricate detailing as well as Real Riders tyres, and arrive with a display plinth and specialised packaging to enhance collectability.

While the cars will be compatible with the existing and iconic Hot Wheels orange track, Mattel is launching two circuits with F1 branding later in the year. The

Sprint Race circuit features a throttle pedal booster, lap counter, a chicane and an inner track; the Grand Prix Race circuit adds a two-speed, three-lane booster function as well as manual ‘DRS diverters’. The lap counter can be set to a cap of 25, or put into infinity mode so the only limit is human energy.

Once the 2025 F1 season gets into lights-out-and-away-we-go mode, Hot Wheels Experiences pop-ups will open at select races around the world. We expect the queues for hands-on racing to be substantial.

reign and George Lazenby's one-and-done turn in the famous dinner jacket.

This was arguably the golden era of the Bond car before product placement dictated such horrors as Pierce Brosnan's dalliance with jejune BMW production models. But not only does the book cover the evocative cars (it includes the histories of all four Aston Martin DB5s used for filming *Goldfinger* and *Thunderball* in the mid-1960s), it also details fascinating obscurata such as the 'Little Nellie' gyrocopter featured in *You Only Live Twice*.

As ever with Porter Press books, this is sumptuously produced and illustrated, featuring rare archive photographs that have never previously been published.



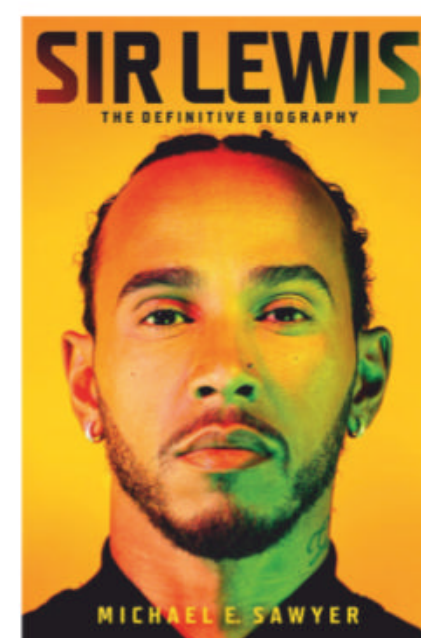
ORIENT BAMBINO LIMITED EDITIONS

Orientwatch.co.uk
RRP £275.99-£399.99

Japanese watchmaker Orient's Bambino range has long been hailed by timepiece connoisseurs for its value proposition; for dress watches these are exceedingly affordable. The range has now grown with four new dial colours aimed at more casual settings, plus three new limited-edition models featuring day and night displays with sun and moon designs, and a further model

commemorating Orient's 75th anniversary in a limited edition of 5500 pieces.

Beige, green, navy blue and Bordeaux with sunburst finishing are the new dial shades, colour-coordinated with pink gold, yellow gold and silver Roman numerals and hands. The limited-edition models pictured here aim for a vintage look with the 1950s Orient logo written in cursive script, an engraved caseback with limited-edition serial number, and a beige nubuck leather strap.



SIR LEWIS: THE DEFINITIVE BIOGRAPHY OF LEWIS HAMILTON

macmillan.com
RRP £20

You may well question the arrival of another biography of seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton but, as he embarks on a new chapter at Ferrari, perhaps this is a good time to take stock. Also, this is the work not of a sports writer but an academic – Michael E Sawyer's previous work includes *The Political Philosophy of Malcolm X*.

Hamilton's story is one of triumph over adversity and, besides chronicling the events of his life, this book aims to place his achievements in a social context. He has accomplished so much more than race and championship victories.





Schuey's steed is a handful

Michael Schumacher did not have a good word to say about the handling of his Ferrari at the 1996 Brazilian Grand Prix, describing its rear-end instability as “so bad you would

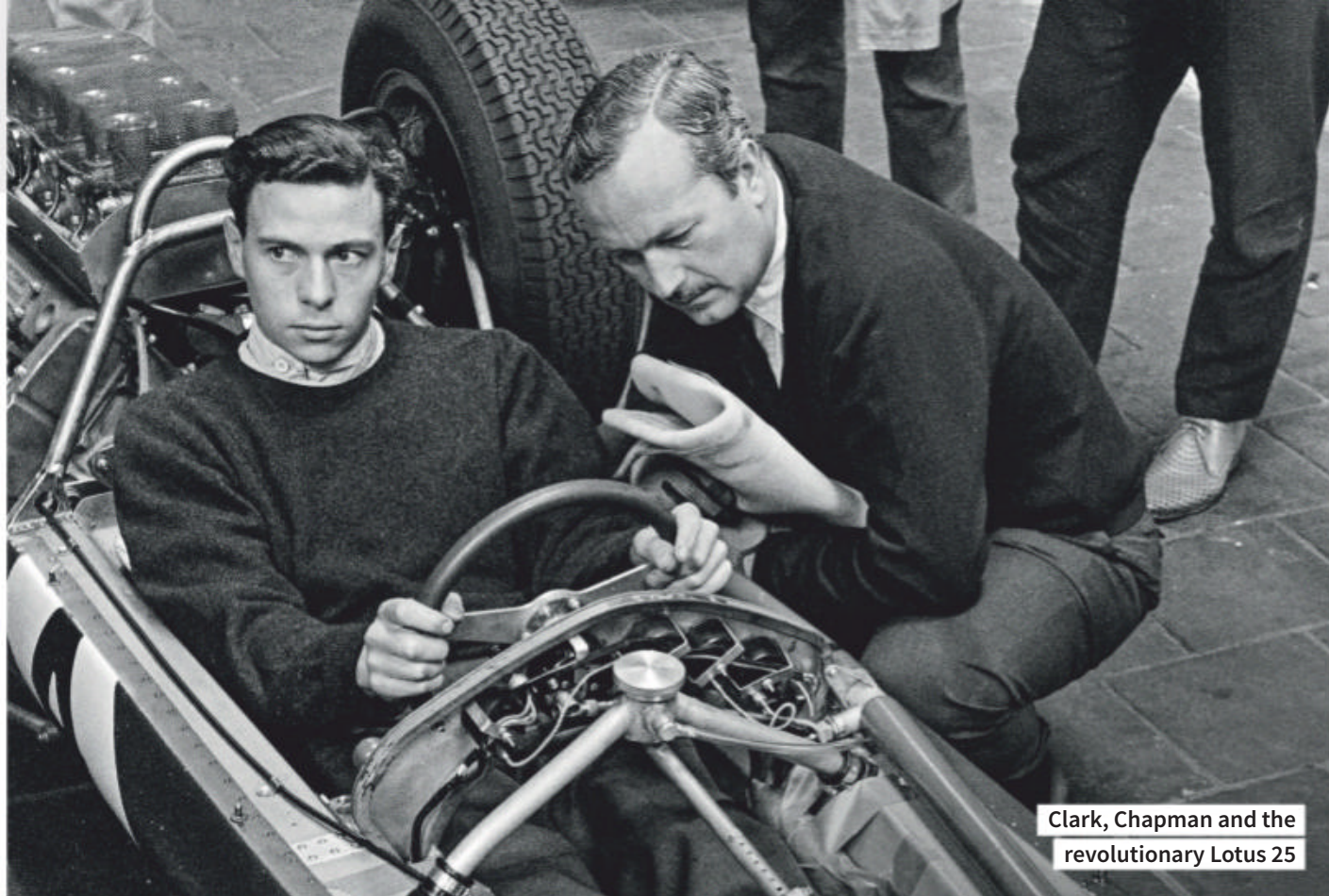
not believe it”. His travails stemmed from the team having to employ the previous year’s rear suspension and transmission due to the casing on the F310’s titanium gearbox cracking.

Here he battles the Jordan of Rubens Barrichello in the race’s soaking early stages. After they locked horns again much later, the Brazilian spun off and Schumacher finished a lapped third.



Photographer Mark Sutton/
Motorsport Images

Where Interlagos, Sao Paulo
When Sunday 31 March 1996



Clark, Chapman and the revolutionary Lotus 25

PHIPPS/MOTORSPORT IMAGES

The start of many new Formula 1 eras

25 May 1962

The season-opening 1962 Dutch Grand Prix (in May!) was a Formula 1 milestone moment in multiple ways. It represented the beginning of success for two motorsport legends, brought a major technical innovation, and there was even a little bit of controversy.

The move from 2.5-litre to 1500cc engines had been flagged at the end of 1958, but the British teams were unhappy and largely decided to try to act as though it wasn't going to happen. So, having finally got to the front of F1, they handed the advantage away again when those regulations *did* arrive in 1961.

Ferrari had prepared properly and, aside from two masterclass drives from Stirling Moss, dominated the campaign, winning five of the eight championship rounds and both titles. But Ferrari's advantage largely lay in the power of the V6 engine in its 156 'Sharknose', and the British teams got their acts together for 1962.

Chiefly, Lotus got hold of Climax's V8 and BRM fine-tuned its own V8. Lotus boss Colin Chapman had penned the neat Lotus 24 and

sold it to customers as a competitive F1 proposition. Which was fine, until his factory team turned up at Zandvoort for the opening round with the 25. The monocoque car was stiffer, had a reduced frontal area, and made the spaceframe 24 (and most other F1 designs) obsolete overnight. Some of the customers were not impressed...

"Chapman has once again startled rival designers," said Autosport in our 25 May issue. "The introduction of such a machine proves without question that Formula 1 racing is still very much a challenge to engineering skill. There is little doubt that Great Britain still has a say in racing car design."

Although he qualified 'only' third, rising star Jim Clark – then a relative novice with 14 world championship starts and three podiums to his name – grabbed the lead at the start. He led Hill until clutch trouble intervened and the BRM swept into the lead on lap 12 of the 80.

Aside from losing one of his eight vertical exhaust 'chimney stacks', Hill never looked troubled on the way to his maiden world championship GP victory. He finished 27.2 seconds ahead of Trevor Taylor, Clark's team-mate giving the Lotus 24 what would be its best result in a points-paying race.

After clutch repairs, Clark came home as the last classified finisher in ninth, 10 laps down, but Zandvoort had set the scene. Although Cooper and Porsche would also take GP wins in 1962, the season was really all about Clark versus Hill.

The Lotus was often faster – Clark took six poles from nine rounds – but the BRM finished more races. That meant Hill went to the season finale in South Africa (on 29 December!) with the points lead, but victory for Clark would still make him champion. The Lotus dominated for the first 61 of the 82 laps before an oil leak struck and Hill was left to win both the race and title, with four victories to Clark's three. It was the first time that a British driver of a British car had taken the F1 crown, and Clark/Lotus would follow that up by crushing all opposition in 1963.

Between the start of 1962 and the end of 1968, Clark and Hill would win 38 world championship races (Hill's 14th and final victory came in 1969) and four world titles between them, not to mention an Indianapolis 500 each! Ferrari, on the other hand, would have to endure a long wait between John Surtees's success in 1964 and the arrival of an Austrian legend the following decade.

KEVIN TURNER



Breakthrough win for Hill at Zandvoort

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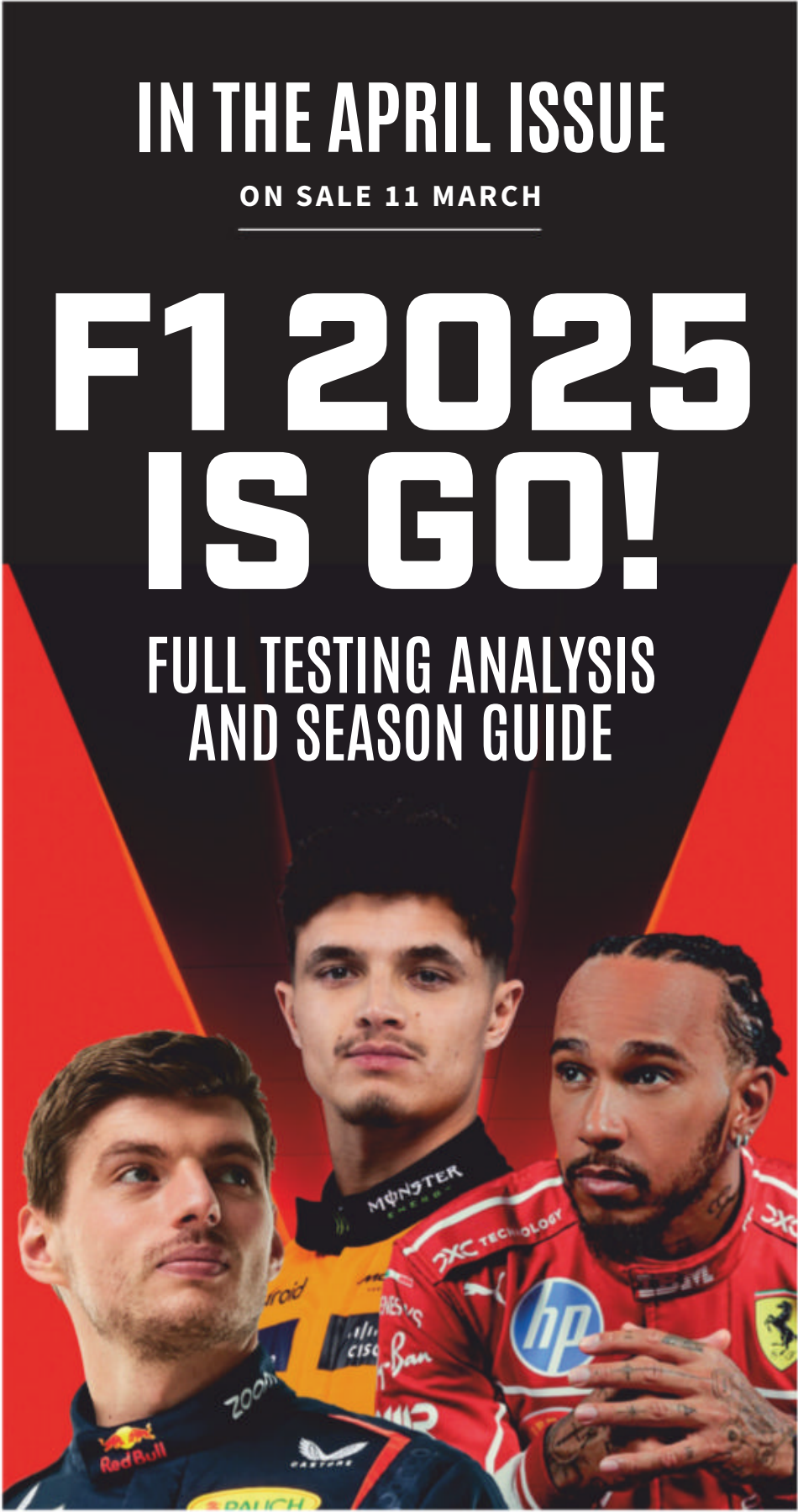
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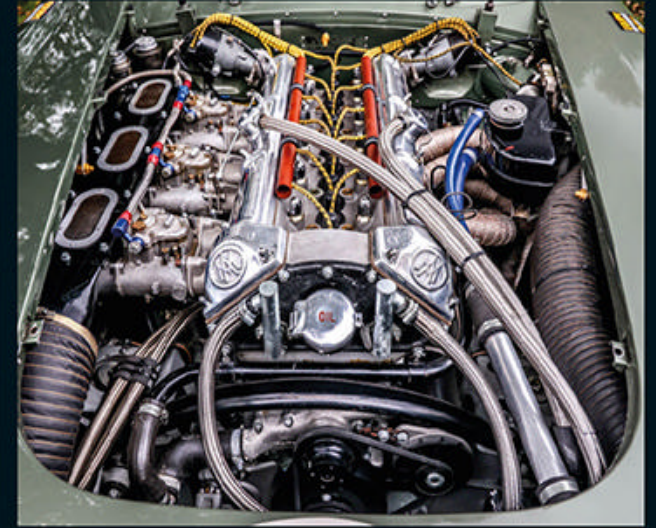


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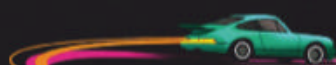
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